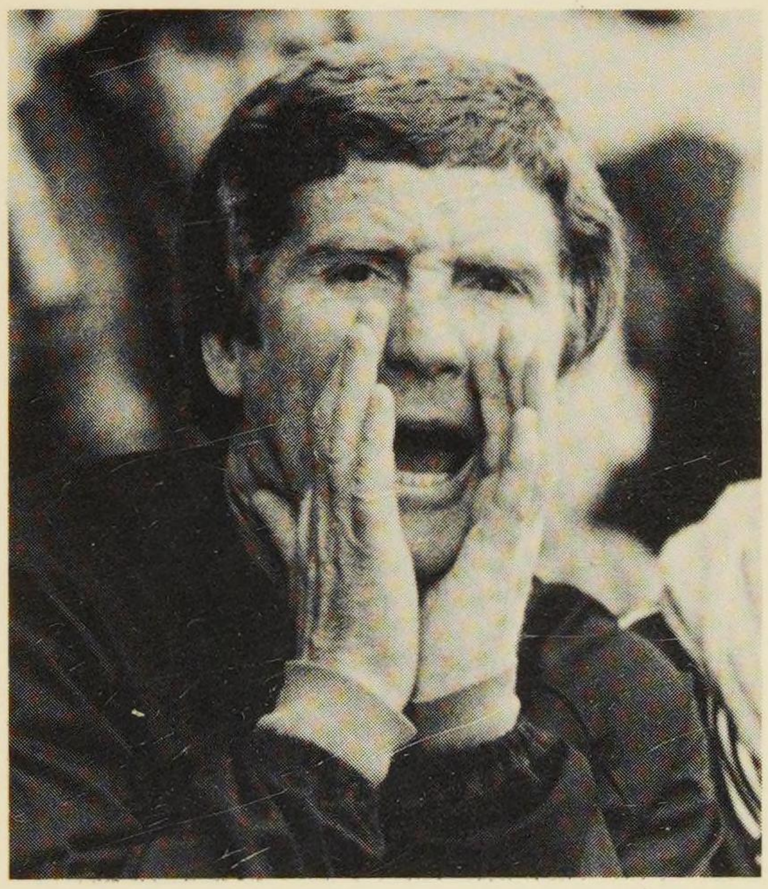
POMPEY

SEASON 1984-1985



The News

THE NEWS SPORTS MAIL FOOTBALL EDITION

Mike Neasom, Photography Murray Sanders

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SEASON 1984-1985

Mike Neasom and Murray Sanders

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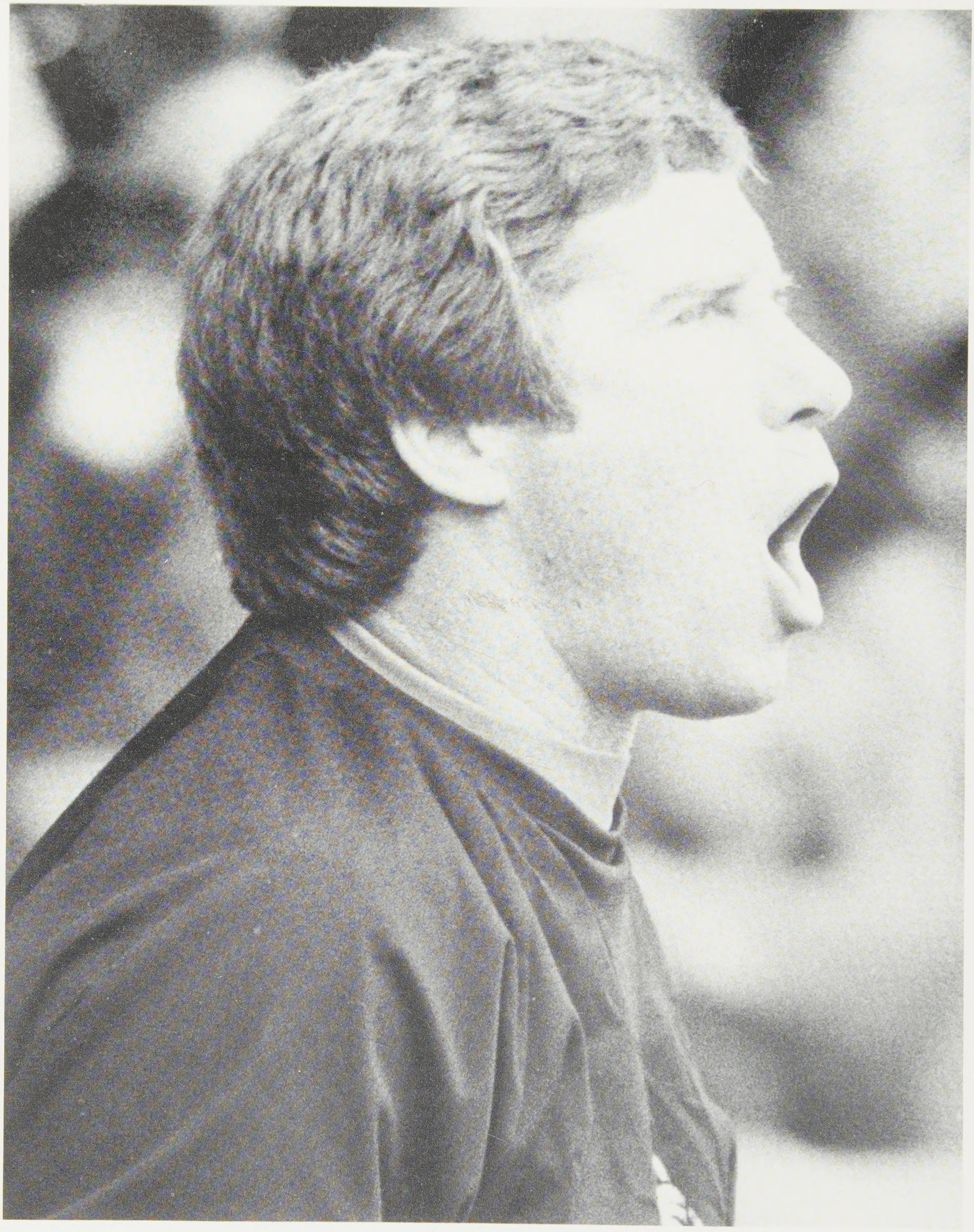
Front Cover left to right
Neil Webb and Kevin O'Callaghan
Alan Ball
Mick Kennedy

Back Cover left to right
Billy Gilbert
Kevin Dillon
Vince Hilaire

POMPEY

Contents

1. 1927 Re-Visited *page 5*
2. August 1984 *page 9*
3. September 1984 *page 12*
4. October 1984 *page 21*
5. November 1984 *page 25*
6. December 1984 *page 29*
7. January 1985 *page 34*
8. February 1985 *page 50*
9. March 1985 *page 57*
10. April 1985 *page 79*
11. May 1985 *page 108*



Alan Ball - the eternal optimist.

POMPEY

1. 1927 Re-visited

Luck's habit of equalizing itself over the course of a season, is one of the hoariest of football's many cliches. Pompey and their fans ended 1984-85 wondering whether the span of equalization might in fact stretch a good deal further - like more than half a century. For at the end of a nine month slog of wildly fluctuating quality and reward, it seemed fate decreed a long-standing score should be settled.

It was back in 1926-27 that Pompey and mathematics first became dramatically embroiled. Again First Division status was involved; again the main protagonists were Pompey and Manchester City. Then the two reached the final match of the season level on points, with Pompey a touch ahead on goal average. Both teams were at home on that final day of the season; Pompey to Preston North End, City to already-relegated Bradford.

City, kicking off 15 minutes earlier, cruised home 8-0 to go 0.15 of a goal ahead of Pompey. At Fratton Park they were leading Preston 4-1 and needed a further goal to snatch their prize. "Farmer" Haines duly obliged and City's prematurely opened champagne went flat. In the end the difference was the closest there has been 1.7755 to 1.77049.

The only change in the scenario 58 years on was that while City were at home to Charlton, Pompey had to travel to Yorkshire and Huddersfield.

Yet the fact that this final Saturday was to be decision day, was unexpected in itself. A fortnight earlier City had won at Fratton Park and the race seemed over. City had travelled back from Hampshire five points clear of Alan Ball's side with a superior goal difference. Ball though had emerged from a disappointing dressing room in a defiant mood. "If we win our last three matches and they slip up, we can still do it; in this crazy old game, you can never tell..." It seemed a statement made in wild optimism - yet it so nearly proved right.

City's run-in looked persuasively promising; home to Oldham, away to relegation-headed Notts County and at home to Charlton. Five points would put them beyond Pompey's reach - and that looked easy. In contrast, Pompey needed maximum points to allow hope to flicker on from a visit to Blackburn, themselves still dreaming of snatching the promotion prize, and from entertaining Carlisle and travelling to Huddersfield. But nerves - and injuries - overtook City. While Pompey were winning at Blackburn, City could only draw goal-lessly with Oldham; while Pompey were beating Carlisle, City crashed sensationally at Notts County.

So everything rested on the last day shoot out across the Pennine Way.

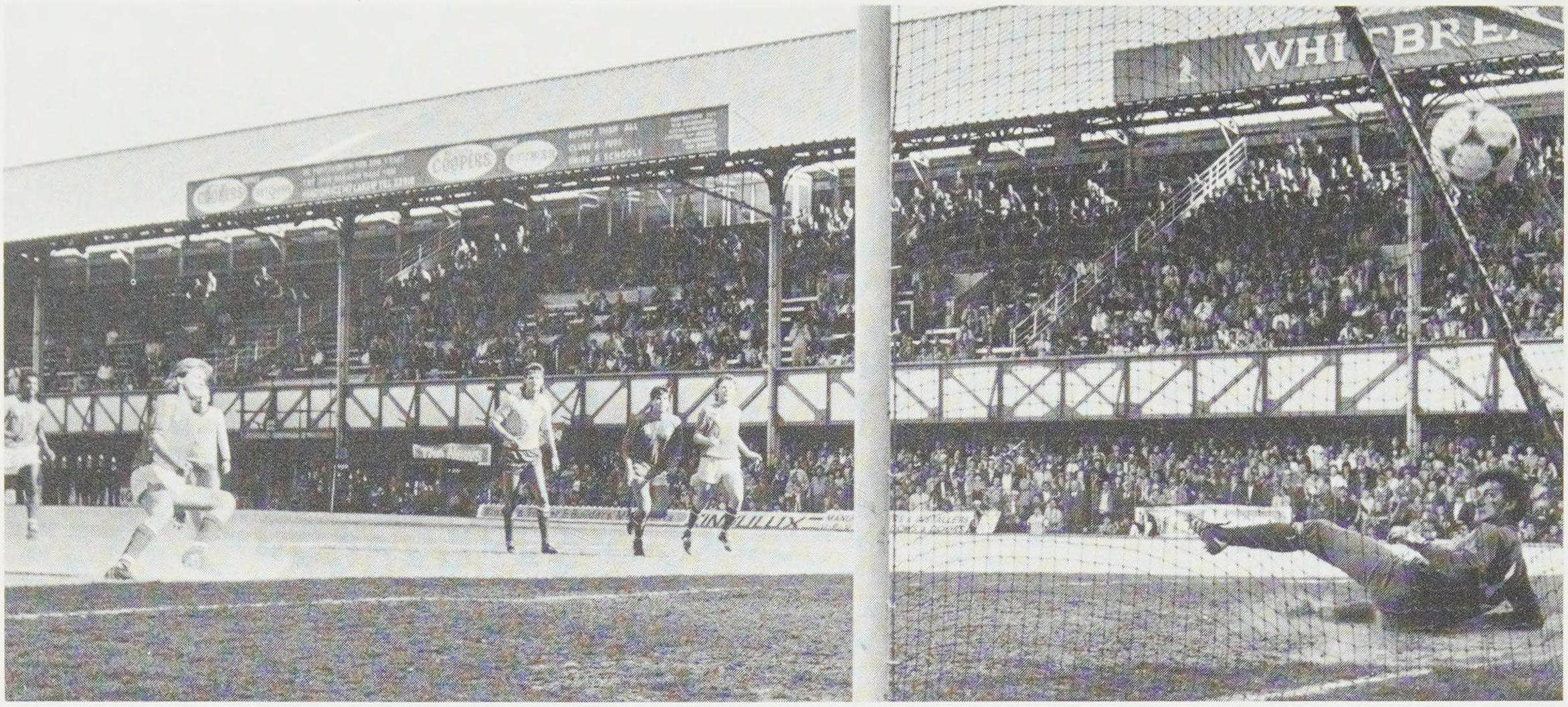
Again Pompey did their bit, winning 2-0 at Huddersfield, but this time City stilled their nerves and cruised home 5-1 to erase the hurt of half a century. In the end they had a goal-difference of seven - and that took them up...so little after nine months and 42 matches.

It was a dramatic climax to a season of wild fluctuations for Pompey. Ball had begun it forecasting promotion, and was never to back-track on that assertion and in the end, going so close could scarcely be faulted. He had basically re-built the side he had inherited the previous May. With the ever-ready backing of chairman John Deacon, who sensed this was the year when his ambition would be fulfilled, he was able to spend almost half a million pounds in the build-up to the season, £150,000 at the last minute on centre-half Noel Blake. That expenditure was enforced when Mick Baxter, the man Ball had signed to link with Billy Gilbert, as the new, much-needed hard-centre to Pompey's defence, was tragically written out of the plot by illness.

Ultimately, after nine months of slog, events were to prove that the one player he had not bought was a replacement for the man whose sale made the summer expenditure possible - Mark Hateley. It was the lack of a big, defence-disrupting centre-forward which was probably decisive and allowed Manchester City to broach the champagne that May day. Over the span of the season, Ball eventually used ten central striking partnerships in a bid to find the answer to his need. But in the end was no nearer a solution.

Billy Gilbert.

Neil Webb.



Kevin Dillon on the mark again.

Only three players were to reach double figures – only one of those a full-time striker; and he featuring for only two thirds of the season before a long-simmering dispute with his manager ended in his departure from Fratton Park.

He, of course, was Alan Biley. Always effective at Fratton where he loved to play to an audience who loved him, but rarely effective away from home, Biley still managed to maintain his impressive one-goal-in-two-appearances striking rate. By the time he left for Brighton he had scored 13 goals. The other double figure men were from midfield, although Neil Webb, who finished the club's top scorer with 18 goals, scored the last half dozen of them as a striker. The third man was Kevin Dillon, but seven of his ten were from the penalty spot. Of the men who donned the Hateley mantle, the most successful was Nicky Morgan but his eight goals in 28 League appearances served to underline the problem.

But the switchback course of the season made it compulsive, if at times, nailbiting viewing. Pompey began impressively, going unbeaten in the League until late October, then losing at the 11th attempt when their confidence was undermined by the first of an eventual string of expensive misunderstandings between goalkeeper Alan Knight and Blake. It was a run which saw them the last unbeaten side in the country, and a run which saw them hit top place in the table for the only time in the season.

Until that defeat at Wimbledon, the comparative bluntness of their attack – 18 goals in 11 matches – had been compensated by the tightness of their defence. Despite using non-specialists at full back, they had prevented the opposition scoring in six matches and the balance looked right. That impression survived another six weeks in which they lost only once and were never out of the top three. Then injury to Gilbert exposed the flaws.

Gilbert, who with the ultimately inspirational Mick Kennedy, was to prove Ball's shrewdest signing, missed the visit to Carlisle in early December and was not to play again until mid-January, a run of seven matches in which they won only twice and in which they conceded an alarming 15 goals.

Early February found them in fifth place, in apparent danger of losing touch with the pack – and then they suddenly came good again. Blake, a player whose season mirrored Pompey's in its highs and lows, snatched a last minute equalizer at Barnsley and launched the second double figure unbeaten run of the season. From that bleak mid-February day in the heartland of Arthur Scargill's 'empire', Pompey were not to know defeat until mid-April when first Birmingham and then Manchester City won in successive matches at Fratton Park to deal ultimately fatal blows to their dream.

Yet in mid-run Pompey, while publicly proclaiming that promotion was still on, were privately admitting defeat. For in advance of what was to prove a classic contest and victory against Leeds at Fratton Park, they had agreed to sell Webb, their most exciting talent to Q.P.R. Only when Leeds had been beaten and Pompey had hauled themselves into joint third place, did Pompey pull out of the deal. They then went another six matches before first Birmingham and then City left them in need of a miracle – yet, thanks to City's nerves, they almost got it.

But the failure to replace Hateley was only a partial cause of them being condemned to another year of waiting and hoping. As serious was their fallibility at home. Pompey had the second best away record in the Division – seven wins and nine draws – but in 21 Fratton Park appearances they could win only 11 times – and that was too great a handicap to carry.

POMPEY

2. August 1984

Ball planned his pre-season strategy carefully. While appreciating the financial attraction of a series of home friendlies against First Division opposition, the format of previous years, he opted for a lower key approach. Having largely re-built the squad of players he had inherited by the signing of Mick Kennedy, Billy Gilbert, Mick Baxter and Scott McGarvey, Ball argued that it was better to inculcate them into the playing pattern he wanted in matches where the pressure would be less.

So Pompey began their build up towards the first League match at Basingstoke where a very much experimental side ultimately won 1-0 with a goal by Paul Wood. They followed that with a less-than-convincing performance at Waterlooville where it took a late goal by 16-year-old apprentice Lee Sandford to beat their neighbours. Pompey were at full strength though when they travelled to the London outskirts to face Hillingdon to win 5-0. Scott McGarvey made a good impression on his first appearance, scoring twice, with Neil Webb starting as he was to continue throughout the season by getting two more and Wood completing a comfortable and impressive victory.

Unknown to the handful of Pompey fans who made the journey to the fringe of London Airport, this was to prove the only match in which the unfortunate Baxter was to play. When Pompey travelled to Salisbury at the end of that week, Baxter was missing - an absence attributed at the time to a slight injury. It was only 48 hours later that the real reason was revealed. Baxter who had joined from Middlesbrough during the summer, had been struck by a mysterious illness which was later to be diagnosed as a severe glandular disorder. Pompey initially resigned themselves to being without the 27-year-old who had cost Middlesbrough more than £400,000 from Preston North End, for up to six months - in the end Baxter was still under treatment but, happily, showing signs of winning a worrying battle for his health, by the time the summer arrived.

But that night at Salisbury all this was unknown; Pompey were given a tough, physical work-out by the Wiltshire team and eventually won 2-0 with McGarvey getting both goals to raise hopes that the mantle of Hateley had fallen on shoulders which were broad enough to carry it. The fair-haired Scot heightened that feeling the following week as he snapped up two more in a 3-0 win at Hastings which wound up the getting-to-know-you phase of Ball's plans.

There was one more match in the schedule - a Fratton meeting with Queen's Park Rangers. Before that Ball, with the eager support of his Chairman, had acted to meet the Baxter emergency. Chairman Deacon came up with another £150,000 and Noel Blake arrived from Birmingham to partner Billy Gilbert in the centre of Pompey's defence.

The visit of the Terry Venables-schooled Rangers brought something of an air of realism to the scene. For 30 minutes Pompey were the equals of their First Division visitors but gradually ran out of ideas against a well-drilled defence and conceded their first two goals. But Ball was well pleased with his players' integration, and approached the first match willing to proclaim that promotion would be their's.

Ironically, that first match was to be a repeat of the first of the previous season - at home to Middlesbrough. But the F.A. disciplinary procedure decreed that Mick Kennedy would be unable to face his old team mates through a carry-over two match suspension - and illness meant that Baxter, too, would be missing. Pompey were also without Gilbert, who like Kennedy, was suspended for the first match.

August 25
POMPEY 1, MIDDLESBROUGH 0

History might well have repeated itself in the choice of opposition; fortunately not in the result. Where Pompey had begun the previous season with a controversial defeat, they started this time with a solid, if unspectacular victory.

But it was expensive in its way as another injury occurred to threaten Ball's hopes. Ball had gone into the season without an experienced left-back since Colin Sullivan was struggling to shake off a long-standing injury which was initially diagnosed as Achilles tendon trouble but months later was found to be an ankle problem which required surgery.

So Ball had given the responsibility to 20-year-old Paul Hardyman who had progressed through the reserves and had performed encouragingly in pre-season. But only 15 minutes into the opening match and Hardyman tore a hamstring, an injury which was ultimately to keep him out of first team contention until the New Year.

It was a demanding match physically with the temperature nudging the mid '70's and it was not until the 87th minute that Pompey broke the deadlock. Then substitute Nicky Morgan's long cross was missed by the 'Boro defence and Alan Biley nipped in to earn Pompey three points.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Hardyman (Morgan), Doyle, Blake, Waldron, Webb, Tait, McGarvey, Biley, Dillon.
Middlesbrough: O'Hanlon, Wood, Ward, Buckley, Mowbray, Nattrass, Mills, Hamilton, Otto, Sugrue, Currie. Sub, Gill.
Referee: K. Cooper (Pontypridd)
Attendance: 13,070

Ball's worries over the left side of his defence were not helped by the continuing misfortune of Richard Money. Money who had severely damaged the ligaments in a knee the previous October, had hoped to be fit to challenge for a place from the start of the season, but instead found himself facing another operation.

The first Tuesday of the new season found Pompey in the Milk Cup against newly promoted Wimbledon – and victory had its problems with another defensive injury.

August 28
POMPEY 3, WIMBLEDON 0
Milk Cup first round, first leg

Wimbledon came with a reputation for a physical, simplistic approach to football and were to live up to it. But in the end Pompey carried too much sophistication for them and were to build a three goal cushion which was to safely carry them into the second round. It was hard work building it though. Wimbledon made certain of that.

The Londoners found themselves having to try to cope with more skilful opposition with ten men for much of the second half after central defender Michael Smith had been sent off for his second bookable offence of the night, a wild tackle from behind which cut down Scott McGarvey.

Who's a clever boy; Alan Biley in typical goal-celebrating pose and mood.

Pompey's team showed one change from the Middlesbrough match; Gilbert had served his suspension and was free to partner Blake in the middle of the defence, allowing Malcolm Waldron to deputize for the unfortunate Hardyman. But Waldron was not to last the match; a tackle from behind damaged his ankle and so Ball's defensive problems grew a little more.

It took Pompey 33 minutes to bring order and shape to a match notable previously for its pace and physical endeavour. Then Neil Webb ran on to Mick Tait's pass and fired a fierce low shot across Dave Beasant and just inside the post. Immediately before the interval Webb surpassed that effort; a slick move between Doyle, Dillon and Biley saw Webb break on the left to drift a glorious shot over Beasant and into the far corner of the net.

Tait became the latest emergency left back for the second half with Wood on as substitute, and Pompey cruised steadily towards victory with Smith's sending off increasing the pressure on Wimbledon. But it took until the 87th minute for Pompey to get their third goal. Then Biley was brought down by Beasant and Dillon preserved his perfect record from the penalty spot.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Waldron (Wood), Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Tait, McGarvey, Biley, Dillon.
Wimbledon: Beasant, Kay, Winterburn, Galliers, Smith, Morris, Evans, Ketteridge, O'Berg (Sayer), Gage, Hodge.
Referee: Brian Stevens (Stonehouse).
Attendance: 8,999.

The only discordant note to the bright start to the new season came with the revelation that Bobby Campbell had issued a writ for wrongful dismissal.

Paul Hardyman - 15 minutes into season and disaster struck.

POMPEY

3. September 1984

The month began with a match which was already seen as potentially decisive in the battle for promotion; Pompey, short priced with many bookies, visiting Third Division champions Oxford United, a club re-vitalized by the partnership of controversial chairman Robert Maxwell and manager Jim Smith. And it was to prove a match which lived up to its advance publicity.

September 1
OXFORD UNITED 1, POMPEY 1

For the third match in a row minute 87 was to be a productive one for Pompey — and here a magic moment for 19-year-old Paul Wood. Wood had been called off the substitute's bench to replace the unconvincing Scott McGarvey and, with Oxford apparently heading for an own goal victory, snapped up a dramatic, coolly taken late equalizer.

Ball had surprised many by gambling on the enthusiastic professionalism of one-time Oxford apprentice Mick Tait to answer his left-back crisis, but typically Tait rose to the demands of a new position.

The match itself was a hard, tight affair, with Kennedy quickly establishing biting authority midfield. But to the disappointment of a near-capacity Manor Ground crowd, there were few threats of a goal - and it needed a mistake by Gary Stanley to break the deadlock. Just before the interval, Stanley got his foot to a bouncing ball as Billy Hamilton challenged, and it bobbled gently past Alan Knight.

Until the 87th minute it looked as though Stanley might go down as the man who inflicted Pompey's first defeat. Then Wood reprieved him. Tait had the satisfaction of starting the move, Dillon helped the ball on through the middle and Wood's perfectly judged run sprung the offside trap and the youngster raced clear to calmly slide the ball past the advancing Steve Hardwick.

Paul Wood - dramatic and spectacular last gasp equaliser.

Oxford: Hardwick, Langan, McDonald, Trewick, Briggs, Shotton, Rhoades-Brown, Aldridge, Hamilton, Hebberd, Brock. Sub, Jones.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, McGarvey (Wood), Biley, Dillon.
Referee: T.J. Holbrook (Wolverhampton).
Attendance: 11,086.

Pompey now turned their attention back to the Milk Cup and headed off to Plough Lane and another dose of the Wimbledon aerial treatment.

September 4
WIMBLEDON 1, POMPEY 0
Milk Cup, first round, second leg

If the previous Saturday's match had lived up to its advance billing, so too, did this one. Wimbledon's reputation for simplistic football, based on the theory that the ball kicked hardest arrived soonest, proved well founded.

Pompey found themselves subjected to a 90 minute barrage of high balls and whirlwind running which, if no more, proved their resilience. As a spectacle though it was less than appealing and long before the end of the value of the three goal lead, which had been clinically built at Fratton Park a week earlier, was proved.

Wimbledon had sprung one surprise 30 minutes before the kick-off by naming David Kemp as their substitute. The little striker who had been so popular and productive in his time with Pompey, was home on holiday from America and had signed for the London club on non-contract terms. In the end he featured only briefly in the action, but Wimbledon's hurly-burly style was not suited to his neat touch and in his few minutes on the pitch, he made no contact with the ball.

Pompey's main consolation from the evening was the resilience displayed by their defence in which the partnership of Blake and Gilbert was outstanding, with Alan Knight's handling impressively secure. All Wimbledon's energetic endeavour could produce was a single goal in the 37th minute. It came as Alan Cork laid a pass back and from the edge of the penalty area, Kevin Gage found a way through a crowd of players to beat Knight.

But a second goal might have made life difficult for Pompey and immediately after the interval only a superb double save by Knight averted it. He brilliantly beat away a powerful shot by central defender Mark Morris and recovered in time to block the follow up.

Wimbledon: Beasant, Kay, Winterburn, Handford (Kemp), Hatter, Morris, Evans, Ketteridge, Cork, Gage, Hodges.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, McGarvey, Biley, Dillon. Sub, Wood.
Referee: Tom Bune (Surrey).
Attendance: 4,670.

But the match meant that Pompey's striking rate was less than impressive – only one goal in four matches from the central partnership of McGarvey and Biley.

After the following week-end, the worries had increased still more and the pair's record stood an unimpressive one in five.

Alan Knight - commanding under pressure.

September 8
POMPEY 0, BARNSLEY 0

A dreary, sterile bore of a match where the only consolation was that Pompey at least got a point. But on the bright side, there was at least an effective performance from McGarvey who had found it so difficult to live up to the promise of his pre-season scoring exploits. He did in fact get the ball in Barnsley's net but the effort was ruled out for offside, and also hit a post and saw goalkeeper Clive Baker produce two fine saves to deny him.

Barnsley created no danger as Pompey's defence turned in another highly competent display and what little action there was came at the other end. McGarvey though looked the one man capable of achieving anything, but his luck was out.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, McGarvey, Biley, Dillon (Wood).
Barnsley: Baker, Joyce, Law, Ronson, May, Futcher, Geddis, Thomas, Walsh, Plummer (McGuire), Campbell.
Referee: Lester Shapter (Torquay).
Attendance: 11,509.

As the goal-famine went on, Nicky Morgan stepped up his pressure for consideration. Combination League football returned to Fratton Park after an absence of two decades with Pompey beating Bristol Rovers Reserves 4-2, fired by a hat trick from the burly Londoner. It was enough to earn him a recall to the squad to visit Elland Road for another intriguing meeting with a side who were among most people's tips for promotion. But as they prepared to travel to Yorkshire, there were reports, quickly denied, that Pompey were keen to recruit Norwich City striker Keith Bertschin to give height and power to their attack.

Elsewhere, matters medical continued to play a large part in the club's life. Money had had another operation on his knee, Sullivan was still in trouble with his ankle and Paul Wimbleton's hopes of at last resuming his long-interrupted career, hinged on yet another specialist's examination of his much-surgeried knee.

Morgan got no better than the substitute's job at Leeds – although ultimately with dramatic results.

Nicky Morgan off the substitute's bench to turn the match . . .

September 15
LEEDS UNITED 0, POMPEY 1

Alan Ball has ever been a gambler – and here a hunch paid off with a classic goal and an impressive victory. Ball's gamble was at the expense of McGarvey. McGarvey was 50 minutes into his most convincing and consistent performance for his new club when Ball showed the come-in-Number-9 card and sent on the burly Morgan in his place. Within ten minutes the move had paid off; Morgan's strength allowed him to half ride a heavy tackle, and recover his balance to cross perfectly for the ever alert Biley to head a magnificent goal.

"I just had a hunch it might pay off; Scott had been the more effective of the two up front, but I fancied Biley might pinch a goal," Ball explained.

It's pay-off left Pompey unbeaten and already proving that Ball's summer concentration on re-building the defence he had taken over from Campbell and adding more fire in midfield had been right. Leeds had gone into this match with the impressive statistic of scoring five goals in their two previous home matches; here they were limited to scarcely a sniff of a goal. Again the key was the burgeoning understanding between Blake and Gilbert who had settled quickly into an impressive partnership; again there was solid backing from stand-in full backs Stanley and Tait.

The development of the defence was borne out by the concession of only one goal in the first five League matches. With Alan Knight again handling surely, Leeds were never in with a chance of building on their solid start to the season and Pompey travelled back south lifted by their most effective performance so far.

Leeds: Harvey, Irwin, Gray, Watson, Linighan, Aspin, Wright, Sheridan, McCluskey (Ritchie), Lorimer, Sellars.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, McGarvey (Morgan 62), Biley, Dillon.
Referee: R.A. Banks (Manchester).
Attendance: 19,435.

The win at Elland Road was the ideal launch pad for what was Pompey's most difficult match of the season so far – a visit to unbeaten leaders Birmingham City. For Blake this was a special night; a return to the club he had supported since school and had played for until his sudden move to Fratton.

And the big West Indian rose to the occasion magnificently. He was faced by Mick Harford, one of the toughest centre-forward's in the Division, while Gilbert had to cope with Wayne Clarke, youngest member of the prolific Walsall family which supplied Allan to England and Leeds.

Birmingham had won their first five matches, conceding only two goals in scoring ten – there could be no better test of the quality Ball insisted existed within his team. And so it was to prove.

September 18
BIRMINGHAM CITY 0, POMPEY 1

A big night; a meeting of two famous old clubs determined to regain former glories – Birmingham to achieve the rare achievement of bouncing straight back after relegation. For once the occasion was not a let down; it was a fascinating match, but a match almost totally one sided.

Pompey's eventual victory might have been by only a single goal but it was emphatic and complete. They produced a team performance of such quality that Birmingham were never in serious contention. So complete was their control that an early chance which fell to Harford and was wasted, was the only threat there was to Pompey's unbeaten record. Otherwise Harford and Clarke were totally subdued by Blake and Gilbert, with the rest of Pompey's defence as effective.

There was controversy late on when Birmingham's firebrand winger Robert Hopkins was sent off but that had little influence on the destination of the points –those belonged rightly to Pompey. The decisive goal came late, further evidence of the spectacular and mature finishing qualities which were to make Webb the target for a string of big club scouts all season.

Birmingham: Coton, Brian Roberts, Van Den Hauwe, Billy Wright, Armstrong, Daly, Kuhl, Gorman, Harford, Clarke, Hopkins.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, Biley, Dillon. Sub, McGarvey (not used).
Referee: Peter Tydlesley (Stockport).
Attendance: 18,012.

Now see here Billy . . . . Noel Blake makes a point to his partner Billy Gilbert; between them they made a very effective point to Birmingham's strikers - our penalty area's a no-go area . . .

But still Pompey's front-line strikers were not scoring goals; their tally remained Biley's two, and Ball was clearly concerned. Chairman Deacon was on record as being willing to spend again and in the wake of the Birmingham success, Pompey admitted that they were, after all, interested in Bertschin. The former Birmingham centre-forward, who had cost Norwich some £200,000, met Mr. Deacon and Ball and speedily agreed personal terms – but there was a double snag. For a start he was carrying a persistent injury, and understandably Pompey needed evidence of his fitness, and Norwich wanted their money back. That ultimately was to be the insurmountable stumbling block which prevented the deal going through and led to Bertschin eventually moving to doomed Stoke City for less than half the fee Norwich had demanded from Pompey.

While the talking went on Pompey were preparing for a match which looked none-too demanding but which carried an inherent threat for them. Recent history was

littered with occasions when Pompey had built up their supporters' hopes only to bring them crashing down. The wins at Leeds and Birmingham had seen Ball's side close the gap on the early pace-makers – and many people were beginning to believe that perhaps Ball's pre-season optimism had been well founded. The opposition were Shrewsbury, unfashionable perhaps but on the night Pompey had been beating Birmingham, they had defeated Oldham to move, temporarily at least, into second place. So Ball spent the build-up period warning all who cared to listen against complacency – but still stressing that his side 'were a bit special'. The match, though, was anything but special – although it had the right result.

September 22
POMPEY 3, SHREWSBURY 0

It looks a convincing scoreline – those who witnessed the match were far from convinced. But the most encouraging thing about it was that the players themselves were realistic about their performance. They shared the supporters' delight at the win – and their feeling that it was not the performance of a side heading places.

The first half was utterly forgettable; Pompey's attack of Biley and Morgan never hitting it off but being bailed out by their defence who allowed Shrewsbury nothing, with Stanley outstanding as he shackled the potentially destructive Hackett. Happily things improved after the break with Webb lifting the mood on to a high with a superb goal in the 54th minute. Controlling Gilbert's long pass on his chest, the youngster turned and angled home a fine shot.

Shrewsbury desperately tried to salvage the match but their eagerness to push forward ultimately destroyed them. There were only five minutes left when Pompey launched a quick counter which caught their visitors over-committed and Morgan hurled himself between two defenders to head home Dillon's cross. Then on the stroke of full time, Blake's pass instigated a slick eight-pass move which ended with Webb sliding in the third – and his fifth of the season – at the far post.

As Ball said: "In eight days we've beaten the teams who were first, second and third, scored five goals and conceded none, which can't be bad..."

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, Biley, Dillon. Sub, McGarvey (not used).
Shrewsbury: Green, Williams, Johnson, Maclaren, Griffin, Cross, McNally, Bates, Nardiallo (Tester), Robinson, Hackett.
Referee: Mike James (Horsham).
Attendance: 12, 703.

Meanwhile the Bertschin affair rumbled on; Norwich were demanding £200,000; Pompey were refusing to increase their offer of around £70,000 and refusing to take the matter to the League's arbitration tribunal.

But it was the second round of the Milk Cup which was concentrating the minds of players and supporters alike – a meeting with Brian Clough's Nottingham Forest side who were already setting a hot pace in the First Division. This, Ball reckoned, would be the test bed on which the quality of his side could be assessed.

September 26
POMPEY 1, NOTTINGHAM FOREST 0
Milk Cup, second round, first leg

A big occasion – and predictably the night when Alan Biley proved his insatiable appetite for them. It was a memorable match with Forest displaying the cool, composed organization of a side fired in the European arena. Clough merely wanted to deny Pompey a comfortable lead for the second leg and committed no more than two men forward for the entire proceedings, challenging Pompey to take the game to them.

And that was exactly what they did. Fired by Mick Kennedy's hungriest performance so far, with Bobby Doyle hitting his most impressive form of the season, Pompey won the midfield battle, allowing Neil Webb the freedom to display his exciting creativity – a demonstration which was to have its controversial spin-off nine months later. Forest, so intent on survival, were rarely able to embarrass an again impressive defence and the night centred around Pompey's ability to lure Forest out of their disciplined pattern. Eventually they managed it in the 64th minute. Scott McGarvey, substituting for Kevin Dillon, switched a pass out to Kennedy on the right and when the long cross homed in, Biley forced himself in front of Gary Mills to plant his 47th goal for the club into the roof of the net. But it left the question of whether a single goal would be enough to carry them through in the difficult second leg?

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, Biley, Dillon (McGarvey 46).
Nottingham Forest: Sutton, Gunn, Swain, Fairclough, Smalley (Mills 60), Bowyer, Wigley, Metgod, Hodges, Davenport, Walsh.
Referee: Ray Lewis (Great Bookham).
Attendance: 20,409.

So Pompey approached the end of the first full month of the season with the Wimbledon second leg as the only blot on their record. But the last match was to hold a lesson for them when a moment of over-elaboration cost them victory at Charlton.

September 29
CHARLTON ATHLETIC 2, POMPEY 2

For the first time in the season Pompey managed to score a first half goal – two in fact – but also managed to toss away two takeable points. For 44 minutes they were in total control against a perplexed Charlton side and as they approached the interval their fifth win in seven League matches seemed little more than a formality.

They had played some masterly football from the base of that solid defence and, with Neil Webb and Kevin

Dillon's wide ranging roles pulling Charlton to pieces, constantly threatened goals. In the end they struck twice within a minute with glorious headers.

The first was from Biley; like that against Forest four days earlier its architect was Kennedy with a searching long cross which was powered just inside the far post. Within 60 seconds, Dillon's centre had beaten the defence and this time it was Morgan who struck devastatingly.

For 20 minutes Pompey threatened to bury their toiling hosts but then a minute from the interval, a moment of over-ambition by Dillon undid them. He lost possession as an over-elaborate pass was cut out and Charlton's quick counter attack ended with veteran Derek Hales heading them back into the match.

The start of the second half was a nightmare for Pompey; the goal had punctured their confidence and Charlton now threatened to run riot. Mick Tait denied Charlton an equalizer by deflecting Mark Aizlewood's shot on to the post but in the 75th minute the Londoners' pressure paid off and Tony Towner levelled and earned them the point they ultimately deserved.

Charlton: Johns, Friar, Dickenson, Gritt, Moore, Berry, Towner, Hales, Lee, Aizlewood, Flanagan. Sub, Madden.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, Biley, Dillon. Sub, McGarvey.
Referee: Alan Seville (Birmingham).
Attendance: 9,251.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

	Home Goals						Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Birmingham	8	3	0	1	7	3	4	0	0	6	0	21
Oxford	7	3	1	0	11	4	3	0	0	8	2	19
Blackburn	8	4	0	0	11	2	1	2	1	7	5	17
Leeds	8	3	0	1	11	3	2	0	2	6	6	15
Shrewsbury	8	3	0	1	12	5	2	0	2	7	7	15
Brighton.....	7	3	0	1	5	2	2	0	1	7	3	15
POMPEY.....	7	2	1	0	4	0	2	2	0	5	3	15
Charlton.....	8	2	2	0	9	5	2	0	2	7	4	14
Man City.....	8	3	0	1	8	4	1	2	1	5	4	14

There's only one winner - Billy Gilbert challenges young Robert Lee; result, Gilbert takes the ball, Lee bites the dust.

Jack-in-the-box between two defenders; Alan Biley nips between Ronnie Moore and Kevin Dickenson to head Pompey's first goal.

and turns to accept the congratulations.

Pompey skipper Mick Kennedy in they shall not pass mood at the Valley

A Morgan knees up - and a congratulatory embrace from Neil Webb after the knees up's over.

POMPEY

4. October 1984

Within three days of the lesson of The Valley, Pompey's fans were celebrating third place in the table – and Scott McGarvey was celebrating his first competitive goal for the club.

October 2
POMPEY 2, SHEFFIELD UNITED 1

Another two goal 60 second burst earned Pompey their fifth win of the season and lifted them to an elevation in the table not enjoyed since 1968 when George Smith came so close to taking them back to the First Division. But although their win was deserved it so nearly failed to arrive. For Sheffield's massed defence had posed problems they rarely looked like unravelling.

Pompey were without Doyle, who had damaged a foot at Charlton, and Ball gambled on Paul Wood's pace unlocking the anticipated Sheffield blockade. But the youngster struggled to make an impact and it was only when McGarvey replaced him that Pompey began to show an ability to open the visitors' defence.

Sheffield had shocked Pompey and the crowd by blasting spectacularly ahead after ten minutes when veteran Ray McHale ran on to a clearance 30 yards out and blasted it into the top corner. Quickly Alan Knight had to make a brilliant leaping save to deny Keith Edwards his 200th League goal and with that danger averted, Pompey took the initiative and began to search for answers to Sheffield's defensive barricade. But it was not until the 70th minute that they found them and then two goals in a minute averted disaster.

McGarvey struck first, hooking home one of Mick Kennedy's tantalizing corners and, bouncing straight back from Sheffield's re-start, Dillon punished momentary hesitation by former Bournemouth defender Tom Heffernan by keeping the ball in play and hooking it across for Morgan to head a glorious goal.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Wood (McGarvey 46), Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, Biley, Dillon.
Sheffield United: Waugh, Heffernan, Bolton, Arnott, Stancliffe, Kenworthy, Morris, Cockerill, Edwards, McHale, Henderson. Sub, Atkins.
Referee: John Moules (Essex).
Attendance: 13,439.

Away from the limelight of the first team, Richard Money set out on the long road back once more, starting his latest round of remedial work after another operation on his knee. And Ball also looked ahead again, recruiting Paulsgrove-raised England youth squad member Kevin Russell for his youth team. Russell had been with Brighton since leaving school, but had obtained his release to join the club he had supported from boyhood.

The month's first week ended with an interesting demonstration of the professionalism and attitude of Ball's players. They stretched their unbeaten League run to nine matches – and then condemned their performance in beating Cardiff which took them to second place.

October 6
CARDIFF 1, POMPEY 2

Victory, coupled with the defeat of Birmingham and Oxford, took Pompey into joint first place – but that could not wipe out their disappointment over a sub-standard performance. Possibly the only happy man in the party was Scott McGarvey, who celebrated the end of five matches as substitute by scoring his second goal which won the match.

But overall it was a poor match with Pompey allowing a struggling Cardiff side to throw them out of their stride. In the first half they were troubled by the canny distribution of veteran former England captain Gerry Francis, a 45 minute performance which probably had much to do with Ball recruiting his experience for Pompey a month later.

Cardiff rocked Pompey by taking the lead in the 25th minute with a sharp cross shot by Karl Elsey – and holding it without difficulty until the interval.

Three minutes into the second half and Pompey were level with the latest demonstration of Neil Webb's finishing quality. He controlled a deep corner by Kevin Dillon, turned a defender and fired a magnificent shot into the roof of the net. In the 68th minute Pompey were ahead with McGarvey powering home a floated cross by Kennedy – and thanks to one fine late save by Knight from Tarki Micallef, the lead survived.

But Ball's "the players have sent me out to apologize for their performance" still came as a shock; such realism is unusual.

Cardiff: Smelt, Jones, Grant, Dwyer, Smith, Tong, Francis (Micallef), Gibbins, Vaughan, Seasman, Elsey.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, McGarvey, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, Biley, Dillon. Sub, Waldron.
Referee: K.P. Barrett (Coventry).
Attendance: 6,201.

And so to Forest's City ground for the challenge of holding on to the one goal lead of the Milk Cup first leg.

October 10
NOTTINGHAM FOREST 3, POMPEY 0
Milk Cup, second round, second leg; Forest win 3-1 on aggregate after extra time.

A cruel case of lightning striking twice inside 12 months. Twelve months earlier Pompey had taken First Division opposition to extra time before bowing out of the competition; and here it happened again.

But it was still an impressive performance by Ball's side who made Forest go all the way for their success. Ball sprang one major surprise by calling up 19-year-old Kevin Ball to deputize for the injured Bobby Doyle with the daunting task of shackling Dutch international Johnny Metgod. With Alan Biley still troubled by a cold, Ball relegated him to the substitute's bench and paired McGarvey and Morgan in attack.

Predictably it was a night when Pompey's defensive qualities underwent their most searching examination so far, but one they passed magnificently with Noel Blake and Billy Gilbert adding to their growing reputation, backed by the battling work of full backs Gary Stanley and Mick Tait. In midfield, Mick Kennedy's busy aggression covered Ball's understandable nerves.

But Pompey reached the interval with their first-leg lead intact; thanks to one shot from Metgod which thrashed behind off a post and three superb saves by Knight. Immediately after the interval Forest poached a simple equalizer, with Steve Hodge scoring from close range after Tait had blocked Peter Davenport's shot.

After that though Pompey's defence again ruled and late on Pompey might well have clinched a memorable aggregate victory but the referee ignored Morgan's appeal for a penalty after Bryn Gunn had hauled him off the ball. But within five minutes of extra time starting, their dream was dead, destroyed by a burst of two goals in as many minutes. The first saw their defence off balance for the first time as Metgod's cross was flicked on by Trevor Christie to leave Steve Wigley with a simple chance and two minutes later a hopeful shot by Gunn deflected off Blake's boot and squeezed under Knight's body.

Nottingham Forest: Sutton, Gunn, Swain, Fairclough, Hart, Bowyer, Wigley, Metgod, Christie, Davenport (Mills), Hodge.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Ball (Biley 65), Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, McGarvey, Dillon.
Referee: Bob Nixon (Lancashire).
Attendance: 18,128.

Mid October was also significant for Pompey behind the scenes – it saw the arrival of physiotherapist John Dickens. Pompey had appointed Reading physio Glenn Hunter during the summer but he had left after only a week. Dickens' employment saw them recruit a man who was to transform their treatment facilities.

As they prepared for their meeting with Grimsby there were also reports that Pompey were keen to sign Ipswich winger Kevin O'Callaghan, stories which were emphatically denied. And the visit of the side from the East Coast who had been involved in three epic battles with them the previous season, also saw a new entry in the saga of Alan Biley – and perhaps the beginning of the end of his time at Fratton.

October 13
POMPEY 3, GRIMSBY TOWN 2

Alan Biley scored a dramatic goal within seconds of coming on as substitute to fire Pompey towards their victory. Until the fair haired idol of the fans made his entry, Pompey had seemed to be lurching towards their first league defeat of the season. But after he had equalized, Pompey grabbed the initiative and then Neil Webb popped up with his seventh goal of the season to pinch a previously improbable victory. Pompey had taken the lead midway through the first half as Webb got to the line, crossed and McGarvey poached his third goal in as many matches from close range. Within four minutes of the interval Grimsby were level as Paul Wilkinson threw himself at a cross by Tony Ford and a fierce header flew by Alan Knight.

Suddenly the after-effects of Wednesday's extra time began to show, Pompey began to look tired and jaded and Grimsby took the initiative. But it took a misunderstanding between Knight and Noel Blake, a demonstration of the lack of understanding between them which was to be so costly, to allow Grimsby to take the lead. As the defensive pair dithered over a bouncing ball, Wilkinson nipped in to score. Only a fine interception by Mick Tait denied Wilkinson his hat trick – and set the scene up for Biley to steal.

He did so within seconds of replacing Nicky Morgan, controlling Webb's pass and rounding Nigel Batch to score his 49th goal for the club and there was only a minute left when the ball broke away from him and turned into a perfect pass for Webb to pinch victory.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan (Biley 70), McGarvey, Dillon.
Grimsby: Batch, Robinson, Crombie, Foley, Nicholl, Moore, Ford, Wilkinson, Matthews, Bonnyman, Emson. Sub, Rowbotham.
Referee: Allan Gunn (Burgess Hill).
Attendance: 13,624.

In the aftermath of the match came the first worrying reports that Neil Webb was the centre of big club interest. Spurs chief scout Bill Nicholson and former England manager Ron Greenwood were at the match, but Ball maintained that Webb would be staying. "He is not for sale," he commented.

The week though was to end with a double shock for supporters – off the pitch and on it. The off-pitch blow came from the boardroom with the announcement that prices were to rise immediately. Ground admission went up to £3 – a rise of 20p – and stand seats to £5 and £6 (increases of 50p and 40p respectively). Pompey claimed they were falling in line with most of their rivals, yet in fact it made Fratton one of the most expensive grounds in the Division.

But that was nothing to the blow which was to fall at Plough Lane, scene of their first defeat of the season in the Milk Cup. There a combination of mistakes contrived to see the end of their record as the last unbeaten side in the League.

October 20
WIMBLEDON 3, POMPEY 2

A farcical own goal, a missed penalty and a disallowed goal – that was the script of the destruction of Pompey's bid to stretch their unbeaten league run to eleven matches. The own goal was a real killer, coming right at the end of a half in which Pompey had withstood the inevitable barrage of long high balls driven into a howling gale. They took it all for 44 minutes and then cracked for the first time. With the interval in sight Alan Knight could only beat out a free kick by Kevin Gage and Alan Cork poached the lead. But within seconds Pompey were two down to the most bizarre goal many have seen. From the kick off, the ball was worked back to Noel Blake and from 30 yards the big centre half rolled it back towards Knight – but his goalkeeper was concentrating on the knee he had jarred blocking Gage's earlier shot and it was only as the ball trickled past him that the goalkeeper knew it was there. His frantic efforts to retrieve the error failed.

But a brilliant 25 yard shot by Bobby Doyle five minutes into the second half put them back into the match – or so it seemed. Ball quickly gambled by replacing full back Gary Stanley to bring on Biley, but before Pompey's defence had re-grouped Wimbledon struck again with Cork completing a century of League goals for the London club from a cross by Nigel Winterburn.

The rest of the match belonged to Pompey – and controversy. Biley, his pride hurt by another afternoon

Alan Ball "Webb is not for sale."

consigned to the understudy's role, eased home his 50th goal for the club from Neil Webb's cross and within a minute Nicky Morgan was fouled to give Kevin Dillon a chance to stretch his immaculate penalty record into double figures. But Dave Beasant in Wimbledon's goal turned his shot against the post and Pompey were still behind. Four minutes from the end though Biley bustled through the middle after a long clearance by Knight and eased the ball home only to have the referee rule it out – and Pompey's record, like Dillon's, had gone.

Wimbledon: Beasant, Gage, Winterburn, Galliers, Morris, Hatter, Martin, Ketteridge, Cork, Sayer, Hodges.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley (Biley 65), Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, McGarvey, Dillon.
Referee: David Axcell (Southend).
Attendance: 8,212.

That on-field setback was quickly followed by another off it. Pompey's pride had been hurt in late summer when the F.A. had turned down their request to set up one of the new Schools of Excellence at Fratton Park and their attempt to persuade the authorities to change their mind now failed. The reason was that Pompey had no F.A. full badge coach as director – yet subsequently it was discovered that long serving Gordon Neave held the qualification. But for Neil Webb, at least, there was encouragement as Bobby Robson invited him to appear in an England under 21 side to play Ipswich in Eric Gates' testimonial; a small step towards the youngster's dream.

The week though held another stunning blow – the end of Pompey's unbeaten home record. And to make it tougher to take, it was inflicted by a Wolves side already skidding towards oblivion and the Third Division.

Kevin Dillon's never-miss penalty record was destroyed by Dave Beasant's save.

October 27
POMPEY 0, WOLVES 1

Pompey revealed their old failing – building people up only to let them down. Despite the defeat at Wimbledon, the increase in prices and the fact that Wolves were a pale shadow of their former selves, the match attracted the best league gate of the season.

All they got for their money was 45 minutes of toil – and another 45 minutes of desperate assault on a massed defence which survived largely through the agility of 21-year-old goalkeeper Scott Barrett who made an expected debut when Tim Flowers was ruled out by raging tooth-ache. And to rub further salt into the wounds, the goal which ended the unbeaten record was an untidy affair in which both Knight and Blake were helpless contributors. It came in the 20th minute with a header by Jim Melrose, who had already wasted two glorious chances, powering off Knight and into the net off the helpless Blake.

Pompey reached the interval without producing a shot to trouble young Barrett and took off Kevin Dillon in the hope that Scott McGarvey might add extra bite to their attack. But although they spent the entire second half encamped around Wolves' penalty area they rarely threatened to preserve their record. Alan Ainscow did clear one Nicky Morgan header off the line and Barrett produced one fine save from the hard working centre-forward, but generally Pompey achieved little for all their effort.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, Biley, Dillon (McGarvey 46).
Wolves: Barrett, Humphrey, Barnes, Cartwright, Pender, Dodd, Ryan (Ainscow), Evans, Melrose, Buckland, Butler.
Referee: D. Vickers (Ilford). *Attendance:* 15, 291.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

		Home Goals					Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Oxford	11	5	1	0	18	6	3	1	1	8	3	26
Birmingham	12	3	1	2	7	5	5	0	1	9	3	25
Blackburn	12	5	1	0	15	4	2	2	2	10	7	24
POMPEY	12	4	1	1	9	4	3	2	1	9	7	24
Barnsley	12	4	0	2	10	5	2	3	1	4	2	21
Grimsby	12	4	0	2	9	6	3	0	3	15	14	21
Brighton	12	4	1	1	7	2	2	1	3	8	6	20

POMPEY

5. November 1984

It was a month which started none-too brightly. Young Paul Wimbleton learned that he would need yet another operation on his knee to tighten slack ligaments if he was to win his long battle to play League football again. And Noel Blake, who had established himself as such a defensive force, rocked everyone by revealing that he was having problems adjusting to life away from Birmingham. The big centre-half made it clear that he would play on for a short while but would seek a move if he was unable to come to terms with the South. But on the brighter side, there was a first Eire call up for prolific youth team goalscorer Brendan O'Connell.

The month's action began at Oldham and began well.

November 3
OLDHAM 0, POMPEY 2

Alan Knight produced a performance of sheer brilliance to allow Pompey to rebuild their confidence after two shock defeats in the wind and rain of Lancashire. The young goalkeeper had a magnificent match to break the hearts of the home side. He began his super show with a plunging save from Micky Quinn and went on to make five more magnificent saves – two from Quinn, three from the impressive Mark Ward and another from Tony Henry.

Ball had surprised everyone by recalling veteran youth team coach Dave Thomas for the match when Bobby Doyle was given compassionate leave because of his daughter's illness. And it was the former England winger who was the victim of perhaps the best save of the afternoon – a magnificent flying effort by Andy Goram, the keeper who had understudied Knight during his two England under 21 appearances.

But Knight's brilliance was still the key to the afternoon, allowing Pompey to reach the 56th minute on terms and then to go ahead when Kevin Dillon, having his most effective match of the season, swirled in a corner which Neil Webb neatly tucked away. Oldham now pushed more and more men forward and should have been punished when Biley broke through only to drag his shot wide, and then were punished in the 75th minute when Gary Stanley's cross reached Nicky Morgan who fired it home.

Oldham: Goram, Hoolickin, Donachie, McDonough, Clements, Henry, Palmer, Quinn, Parker, Barlow (McBride).
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Thomas, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, Biley, Dillon, Sub, McGarvey.
Referee: L.M. Robinson (Sutton Coldfield).
Attendance: 3,946.

Pompey used the absence of a midweek match to work on their system against the New Zealand World Cup team. They eventually won 3-2 with Scott McGarvey building his confidence with two sharp goals and the winner coming from 18-year-old Mario Walsh, a second half substitute.

But the rumours about Neil Webb continued to mount. Once more Arsenal were reported to be interested in the 21-year-old midfield who was finally living up to the promise which had come with him from Reading. But again Pompey strenuously denied the stories.

At the same time, the Bertschin affair finally ended. Weeks of silence, with Pompey sticking to their 'we won't go to the tribunal' guns, saw struggling Stoke City, who had failed in a bid to borrow Biley, turn to the Norwich striker for an end to their dreadful scoring record. Bertschin eventually cost Stoke round £80,000, the kind of fee Pompey had seen rejected. But once again McGarvey hinted that he might yet prove the answer to Pompey's comparative lack of goals as they beat struggling Notts County 3-1.

November 20
POMPEY 3, NOTTS COUNTY 1

Scott McGarvey silenced his critics with a quick-fire

double strike late in the first half of an unspectacular match. Pompey again had to recover from the shock of seeing lowly opposition poach the first goal. That came from midfield man Mark Goodwin who beat Knight from 12 yards.

After that Justin Fashanu, who generally played second fiddle to a commanding Noel Blake, might have grabbed a second goal but his header lacked power and Pompey quickly made the most of their reprieve as Bobby Doyle floated in a delicate chip which caught goalkeeper Mick Leonard off his line. McGarvey grabbed the first of his goals in the 40th minute with an unmarked header from Kevin Dillon's free kick and three minutes later flicked in the second after the ever-willing Nicky Morgan had chased and caught a pass from Neil Webb and squared it to the near post.

Bobby Doyle whose second goal of the season put Pompey on the way to their win.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, McGarvey, Dillon. Sub, Waldron.
Notts County: Leonard, Hodson, Benjamin, Richards, Hunt, Woodwin, McParland, Fashanu, O'Neill, Harkouk, Burke. Sub, Jones.
Referee: Les Burden (Poole). *Attendance:* 12,267.

November 17
POMPEY 1, CRYSTAL PALACE 1

Pompey produced another unconvincing home performance against struggling opposition – and it cost them a chance to go to the top of the table. Oxford had created the opportunity by doing no more than scramble a goalless draw at Oldham, but Pompey failed to capitalize.

For the fourth time in five home matches, they allowed the opposition to score first and it was only then that they began to show anything like the form of a side who were

going places. Again Alan Biley had a crucial part to play in the match, once more getting off the substitute's bench to change the course of things. He replaced Dave Thomas, who had taken over from ankle injury victim Kevin Dillon, and with Biley's arrival Pompey finally had the pace to unlock Palace's defence.

The Londoners had shocked the crowd by taking the lead in the 28th minute with 19-year-old Phil Barber running on to Peter Nicholas's through ball to beat Alan Knight. It was a lead which somehow survived until the 75th minute but then Noel Blake's long pass gave Biley the chance to run Brian Sparrow and his cross left Nicky Morgan with a simple tap-in equalizer. Biley almost pinched victory and top place late on when he again outpaced Sparrow only to see his shot hit a post and bounce clear.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, McGarvey, Thomas (Biley).
Crystal Palace: Wood, Hughton, Sparrow, Barber, Nebbeling, Cannon, Irvine, Murphy, Aylott, Nicholas, Mahoney. Sub, Gray.
Referee: Ron Groves (Weston Super Mare).
Attendance: 12,656.

The last week of the month held further proof of Pompey's indebtedness to chairman John Deacon – and to the massive cost of trying to return to the First Division. The accounts for the last financial year showed that Mr. Deacon had pumped in another £175,000 in loans – in a year when gate income came within an ace of £1 million. Although the overall loss on the year was almost £200,000, there was encouragement for Mr. Deacon from a profit of almost £200,000 on football itself. And the accounts did not show any income from the £1 million sale of Mark Hateley which had come shortly after the end of the financial year.

Pompey also acted to soften the blow of their recent price increase by re-instating half price admission for children on the North Terrace. And they also moved to head off future problems under freedom of contract by offering four of their promising young players – Andy Gosney, Paul Hardyman, Paul Wood and Kevin Ball – new two year contracts.

A month which had seen Pompey have problems with two sides close to the foot of the table, ended with them promising much and failing to deliver against rivals for promotion – Manchester City.

November 24
MANCHESTER CITY 2, POMPEY 2

Another case of what might – or should – have been. For 70 minutes Pompey outclassed and outgunned highly rated City, cruising towards victory on the back of two classic goals by the constantly impressive Neil Webb. Then, with the prize apparently their's, they suddenly folded and City were able to silence their fans' criticism by poaching a point. In the end it was a totally perplexing turn-around of a match Pompey seemed to have in their pockets.

They had gone ahead after only eight minutes as Kevin Dillon's pass found Webb unmarked on the edge of the area and he drilled a fierce shot across Alex Williams and just inside the post. It took them until the last seconds of the half to underline their superiority with a second goal but then Nicky Morgan's return pass set up Webb and he took his tally into double figures with another impressive strike.

The match took on a dramatic turn midway through the second half as Steven Kinsey's pace suddenly began to win him mastery over Malcolm Waldron, who was deputizing for the injured Mick Tait. But until the 72nd minute Pompey, while lacking their previous composure, were in no apparent danger. Then an untidy scramble in their goalmouth saw the ball break to substitute Gordon Smith who hammered it home and six minutes later Kinsey accelerated past Waldron, cut in and thundered the equalizer into the corner of the net.

Manchester City: Williams, Sinclair (Smith), Power, Reid, May, Phillips,. Melrose, Baker, Cunningham, Wilson, Kinsey.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Waldron, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, McGarvey, Dillon. Sub, Biley.
Referee: Mark Scott (Nottingham).
Attendance: 23,700.

The month ended with a shock – and two new faces on the scene. The shock was a transfer request from public hero Alan Biley. Unable to win a regular place, Biley asked to be allowed to move on. But the Board, taking manager Ball's advice, refused to accept the request and asked Biley to re-consider his decision.

All this went on against a background of busy transfer activity. Ball moved first to recruit Gerry Francis, who had impressed for Cardiff. The veteran former England captain signed on a free transfer from Swansea to give extra experience to midfield. And although he had earlier maintained that a winger had not been high on his priority list at the time of the O'Callaghan-for-Pompey stories, Ball suddenly acquired one. Pompey paid around £95,000 for Luton's former England Under 21 international Vince Hilaire.

At the same time, they took the first steps to try to avert summer freedom problems with Neil Webb. Webb, whose contract expired at the end of the season, was offered a new three year deal – but declined to accept it.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

	Home Goals						Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Oxford	15	7	1	0	25	9	3	3	1	10	5	34
Blackburn	16	7	1	0	20	4	3	2	3	13	10	33
POMPEY	16	5	2	1	13	6	4	3	1	13	9	32
Barnsley	16	6	0	2	14	6	2	5	1	4	2	29
Birmingham	16	3	3	2	7	5	5	0	3	10	6	27
Leeds	16	5	2	1	16	5	3	0	5	11	15	26
Grimsby	16	5	0	3	16	11	3	2	3	17	16	26
Man City	16	6	1	1	14	7	1	4	3	6	7	26

Nicky Morgan goes between City defenders Nicky Reid and Paul Power.

POMPEY

6. December 1984

It began with a meeting with Blackburn Rovers, the side immediately above them in the table - and what a dramatic match it proved.

December 1
POMPEY 2, BLACKBURN 2

Pompey gave their high-riding visitors a two goal start, caught them and with any luck should have overhauled them. Instead Blackburn left with a point and that was enough to take them to the top of the table and leave Pompey having to be content with third place. Blackburn had arrived as the only side in the League to have scored in every match and their record survived - but only thanks to Pompey.

In a superb contest highlighted by Kevin Dillon's outstanding performance, Pompey could look back on an afternoon when they had little luck. They were out of it early on when Billy Gilbert was denied his first goal for the club by Mick Rathbone's improbable goal-line clearance, but fate really frowned on them as Rovers grabbed a fortunate lead. Ian Miller's fierce shot flew back off the post, straight against Noel Blake and into the net. But shortly before the interval Pompey contrived to give their visitors a second goal; this time Mick Tait sliced the ball out of Alan Knight's grasp and home.

But nine minutes into the second half Pompey were back in the match - Hilaire, on a lively debut, got away on the left and Glen Keeley handled his cross to give Dillon the chance of his tenth penalty for the club - and this time he gave Terry Gennoe no chance. Within 60 seconds Hilaire had levelled things in masterly style; Nicky Morgan fought for possession in the corner, got in a cross and Hilaire flew full length to head a spectacular goal.

Fate had still not finished with Pompey and in the last few minutes Webb blasted a shot against a post and Biley, who had replaced Scott McGarvey, was unable to catch the ball as it rolled across the face of goal.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, McGarvey (Biley), Hilaire.

Blackburn Rovers: Gennoe, Branagan, Rathbone, Barker, Keeley, Fazackerly, Miller, Randall, Thompson, Garner, Patterson. Sub, Quinn.
Referee: Eddie Scales (Ware).
Attendance: 16,284.

Vince Hilaire - a goal on his debut against Blackburn Rovers.

Billy Gilbert crucial, but now ruled out by injury.

But while Pompey were in the thick of things, their playing resources did not bear too close examination. Their reserves were finding the Combination League a tough proposition for a side frequently overloaded with inexperienced apprentices, and after he had watched Fulham overwhelm them, Mr. Deacon ordered urgent action. Ball was authorized to bring in two experienced strikers and on the same day Dave Bamber was bought from Walsall for £20,000 and Paul Sugrue recruited from Middlesbrough on a free transfer. They signed at Carlisle as Pompey prepared for a match which was to bring home the value of Billy Gilbert to their cause.

Gilbert had been an ever-present, apart from missing the first match of the season through suspension, but now he was ruled out by injury. It was the start of a seven match absence by the cool and composed central defender – a run in which Pompey's previously sound defence was to concede 15 goals and set the alarm bells ringing.

December 8
CARLISLE 3, POMPEY 0

Pompey looked anything but a side heading for promotion as they slumped to their worst defeat of the season against Bob Stokoe's shoestring side. Pompey were unconvincing all round but Ball's greatest worry had to be the lack of penetration up front which allowed Carlisle's defence an easy ride.

There was an element of luck about Carlisle's first goal, the ball striking Alan Shoulder on the back but falling kindly for him to score off the far post. That was after only three minutes and it was a lead Pompey rarely threatened to wipe out or Carlisle to increase for the next 77 minutes. Then Alan Knight could only beat out a shot by John Cooke and the unmarked Malcolm Poskett rolled it home and in the last minute Cooke, on loan from Sunderland, crowned his debut with a close range goal to punish more defensive insecurity.

Pompey's gloom at result and performance was not lifted by the F.A. Cup third round draw which came half an hour after the final whistle – a meeting with Blackburn offered a tough slog with the only compensation that it was at Fratton.

Carlisle: McKellar, Haigh, McAughtrie, Ashurst, O'Riordan, McCartney, Shoulder, Halsall, Poskett, Bishop, Cooke.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Dillon (Doyle), Blake, Waldron, Webb, Kennedy, McGarvey, Biley, Hilaire.
Referee: T. Simpson (Halifax).
Attendance: 4,006.

Pompey's board were busy taking more freedom of contract-deflecting moves. Nicky Morgan and Mick Tait accepted new two year contracts and the board also finally rejected Biley's on the table transfer request while Ball also turned down Tommy Docherty's attempt to borrow Scott McGarvey for struggling Wolves.

There was also news of major reconstruction work for Fratton Park with a programme of safety measures which

would cost more than £300,000 over the next three years – prophetic planning it transpired in view of the tragic events at Bradford in May 1985 which were to invoke such Governmental involvement in the game.

December 15
POMPEY 3, HUDDERSFIELD 2

A dramatic match in which Pompey again made life tough for themselves but eventually came good – and a match which saw John Deacon declare war on racists in the crowd.

It was another afternoon of lows and highs for Noel Blake. The big West Indian, fighting so hard for acceptance from the fans and for personal acceptance of club and area, was the butt of criticism as his early error allowed a harmless looking ball to escape his control to leave Dale Tempest with a simple chance.

So for the sixth time in seven home matches, Pompey had to come from behind. Shortly before the interval they were level as Gary Stanley's free kick from just outside the penalty took a slight deflection and earned him his first goal for the club.

But again Pompey seemed determined to make life hard for themselves and in the 63rd minute Malcolm Waldron, deputizing for Billy Gilbert, cracked a cross from Dave Cowling into the roof of his own net. For 15 minutes this latest mistake looked like costing the match but suddenly Alan Biley who had had a previously ineffectual match, transformed things with a spectacular 51st goal for the club, blasting Neil Webb's pass into the roof of the net. And then came Blake's high – Kevin Dillon curled a cross into the heart of the penalty area and Blake rose above the defence to head a magnificent winner.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Dillon, Blake, Waldron, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan (Doyle), Biley, Hilaire.
Huddersfield: Cox, Laws, Burke, Doyle, Jones, Allardyce, Lillis, Cooper, Tempest, Wilson, Cowling. Sub, Pugh.
Referee: Malcolm Cotton (Camberley).
Attendance: 11,797.

But it was after the match when the bombshell fell. Blake's early mistake had provoked reaction from the terraces – and the big man was understandably upset by the abuse. And chairman Deacon stood by his man. Mr. Deacon pledged to root out racists among the crowd. "I am not going to have them here – and will do everything to get rid of them." Pompey continued their work of planning for the future by offering Bobby Doyle a year's extension to his contract. And, at last, Colin Sullivan made progress towards resuming his career. After four months of frustration his injury was diagnosed as ankle, not Achilles tendon, and Pompey's club captain was to have an operation to clear the trouble. As Christmas approached, Tommy Docherty returned with a second attempt to borrow McGarvey and this time was given permission to do so, but McGarvey turned down the move preferring to stay to battle for acceptance at Fratton.

December 22
POMPEY 2, OXFORD UNITED 1

Thank heavens for Santa Claus. That was the chorus around Fratton after this dramatic affair. And no one was chorusing it more fervently than Alan Biley. For it was the intervention of Santa which allowed Biley to add another dramatic entry to the story of his days with Pompey. It was in the time added by referee Martin Bodenham for a fully-dressed Father Christmas's 'pitch invasion' that Biley conjured two goals from nothing to give Pompey a highly improbable victory. His double strike brought a staggering climax to a match of absorbing quality.

It was a triumphant afternoon for Pompey's defence, and particularly big Noel Blake. After his much publicized problems Blake produced a giant-sized performance to snuff out the threat of Northern Ireland international Billy Hamilton, with Malcolm Waldron equally commanding against John Aldridge.

On a cloying, glue-pot surface, both sides flung themselves at each other, with Pompey winning the crucial midfield battle thanks to Mick Kennedy and Kevin Dillon. But the breakthrough when it came in the 68th minute was by Oxford with Kevin Brock sneaking in behind the defence to sidefoot home a long cross by Dave Langan. With seven minutes left, the mud which had inhibited smooth football, finally turned into Pompey's ally as it trapped a back pass by Gary Stanley after it had looped over Alan Knight's head and averted a disastrous own goal.

So the match entered 'Santa-time' – and Biley turned things on their ear. First Neil Webb ended a move involving Vince Hilaire and Blake with a cross which Biley nodded home at the near post, and straight from the kick off Pompey surged forward again, won a corner which Hilaire played quickly to Kennedy and there was Biley to loop his 53rd Pompey goal into the top corner. Even then the drama was not ended and as affronted Oxford blasted to the other end, Hamilton whacked a shot against Knight's bar.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Dillon, Blake, Waldron, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan, Biley, Hilaire. Sub, Doyle.
Oxford: Hardwick, Langan, McDonald, Trewick, Briggs, Shotton, Lawrence, Aldridge, Hamilton, Hebberd, Brock. Sub, Jones.
Referee: Martin Bodenham (Brighton).
Attendance: 22,446.

December 26
BRIGHTON 1, POMPEY 1

Another up and down day in the life and times of Noel Blake. This hard, gruelling derby once more hinged around the activities of Pompey's centre-half. First it was all gloom for him as his attempted back pass in the 37th minute was underhit and put Gerry Ryan away to beat Alan Knight and give Brighton a lead they scarcely deserved. But before the interval Blake had re-instated himself in the eyes of the Fratton fans. He rumbled

Alan Biley - hero of the hour is surrounded as Pompey celebrate his winner.
And the other hero of the hour - Santa Claus who 'won' the time for Biley to score.

forward as Gary Stanley prepared to take a free kick, knocked the ball down and Vince Hilaire gleefully tucked it away.

His back pass apart, Blake had an outstanding match although pipped for the man of the morning by the free-running Kevin Dillon. It was a match which built up problems for manager Ball for Nicky Morgan was hit by a recurrence of a hip injury and Alan Biley was slowed to a walk by back trouble.

Brighton: Moseley, Hutchings, Pearce, Case, Young, O'Reilly, Penney, Wilson, Ryan, Worthington, O'Regan. Sub, Kraay.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Dillon, Blake, Waldron, Webb, Kennedy, Morgan (Doyle), Biley, Hilaire.
Referee: Mike Dimblebee (Stevenage).
Attendance: 14,854.

It was also rumour-time again. This time Pompey were linked with Arsenal; a swap deal was lined up it was reported – Neil Webb to Highbury and England centre-forward Paul Mariner to Fratton. All, predictably, were denied by Alan Ball.

December 29
SHEFFIELD UNITED 4, POMPEY 1

What a way to end a year! Pompey produced another display of their suicidal tendencies to suffer their worst defeat of the season. Defensively the absence of Billy Gilbert was decisive but in addition they were also forced to use an untried striking partnership of Scott McGarvey and Paul Sugrue – and it did not work. Sugrue ran hard enough but could make no impact and generally Pompey looked a disorganized side.

It might have been different had Neil Webb finished better on the two occasions they managed to break through a defence dominated by borrowed former England man Phil Thompson. But any hope they had of grabbing some return in the last match of 1984, vanished early in the second half when Gary Stanley's cross field pass was cut out by Glenn Cockerill who clipped home from 25 yards as Alan Knight tried to get back to his line. Within a minute Cockerill had set up a second for Keith Edwards and then a bitterly disputed penalty for Waldron's challenge on Colin Morris saw the winger make it 3-0 and convince Pompey it was not their day.

Final proof came two minutes from the end when Mel Eves nodded home another cross by Cockerill. All that remained was one defiant counter attack which saw John Burridge trip his old Crystal Palace mate Vince Hilaire to give Dillon the chance to score from the penalty spot.

Sheffield United: Burridge, Heffernan, Atkins, Mortimer, Stancliffe (Cooper), Thompson, Morris, Cockerill, Edwards, Eves, Arnot.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Dillon, Blake, Waldron, Webb, Kennedy, McGarvey, Sugrue, Hilaire. Sub, Doyle.
Referee: Gilbert Napthine (Loughborough).
Attendance: 14,396.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

		Home Goals					Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Blackburn	22	9	1	1	26	9	5	3	3	19	12	46
Oxford	20	10	1	0	39	9	3	3	3	11	9	43
Birmingham	22	5	4	2	14	10	8	0	3	15	8	43
POMPEY	22	7	3	1	20	11	4	4	3	15	17	40
Man City	22	8	2	1	21	8	3	4	4	13	11	39
Huddersfield	22	6	2	3	17	17	5	2	4	15	11	37
Leeds	22	6	3	2	22	9	5	0	6	17	19	36
Barnsley	21	7	1	2	15	6	2	7	2	9	8	35
Fulham	22	8	0	3	22	15	3	2	6	16	22	35
Brighton	22	5	4	2	11	6	4	2	5	12	11	33
Grimsby	22	7	0	4	22	16	3	3	5	19	22	33
Shrewsbury	22	6	3	2	26	16	2	4	5	14	19	31

Neil Webb to Highbury, Paul Mariner to Fratton. All, predictably denied by Alan Ball.

POMPEY

7. January 1985

January 1 was the day circled on the calendars of countless Pompey fans as the one when the season effectively ended. For to most this was the day which cost the side promotion - and it was hard to argue.

January 1
POMPEY 4, FULHAM 4

A match which would have been amusing it it had not been so very sad. For the first time in 17 years, Pompey knew the luxuriant feeling of leading 4-0 at half time.

Yet in the second half they contrived to throw it all away and, with the last kick of a topsy turvy afternoon, Kevin Lock displayed ice-cool nerve and converted a penalty to give Fulham a point. Conditions were largely decisive; a gale blowing straight down the pitch but some of the mistakes it induced from both defences were less than elementary. The only consolation for the furious Alan Ball was the performance of Neil Webb as a striker. Webb moved forward to partner Alan Biley and fitted easily into his new role.

Fulham had already survived a disallowed goal by Noel Blake before goalkeeper Jim Stannard's first error gifted Pompey the lead in the 16th minute. Stannard failed to hold Mick Kennedy's free kick and the ball ran loose for Malcolm Waldron to tap home his first goal for the club. Two minutes later Stannard missed a header by Webb and the ball came back of the bar for Biley to dart in to head his twelth goal of the season.

Stannard's nightmare continued and, after referee Brian Stevens had limped off to be replaced by senior linesman John Carter of Christchurch, the goalkeeper and Jeff Hopkins confused each other over possession of a wind-assisted clearance by Knight and Webb nipped in to chip home his 11th goal of the season. There was more to come though and in the 39th minute Hopkins drove a clearance against Biley and watched as the ball looped off his face and over Stannard.

Just two minutes into the second half, and Fulham had a goal back with Blake misjudging Ray Lewington's swirling cross to leave Dean Coney to force it home. Pompey then had a penalty appeal disallowed after Hopkin's challenge on Webb but suddenly Fulham struck twice in three minutes and an unlikely escape seemed possible. Mick Tait's loose header fell to Leroy Rosenior who clipped it over Knight and then substitute Gary Barnett was left with an unchallenged header to make it 4-3. Pompey had 13 minutes to survive to hang on to three points - and pride - and they lasted out 12. Then Blake tumbled Cliff Carr over and Lock safely converted the penalty.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Dillon, Blake, Waldron, Doyle, Kennedy, Webb, Biley, Hilaire. Sub, Francis.
Fulham: Stannard, Parker, Carr, Marshall, Hopkins, Lock, Rosenior, Wilson (Barnett 12), Coney, Hughton, Lewington.
Referee: Brian Stevens (Stonehouse) replaced by John Carter (Christchurch) 17 minutes.
Attendance: 17,636.

The New Year saw the departure of Mario Walsh, who had been with the club for two years, his only senior appearance and goal coming as substitute against New Zealand. The young Londoner went on loan to Torquay, a move which quickly became permanent.

The disastrous close to 1984 and ludicrous beginning to '85, scarcely promised for the F.A. Cup tie with a Blackburn Rovers side apparently headed for the First Division.

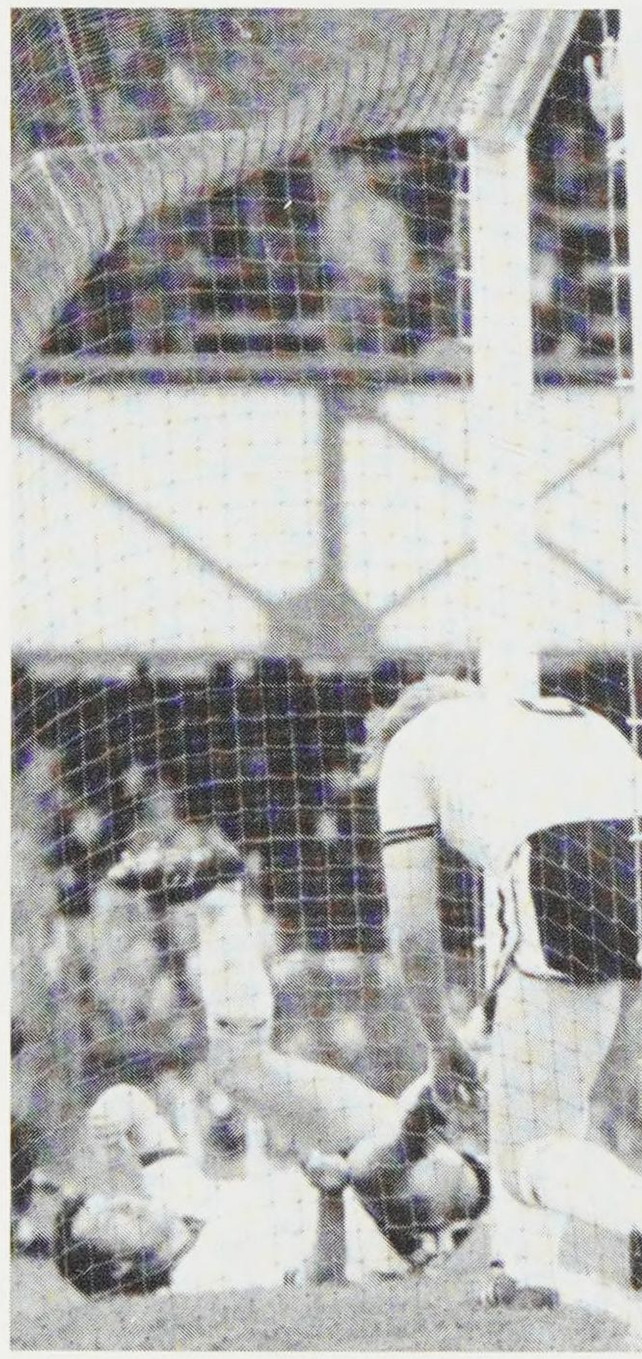
Where did the ref drop that flaming coin . . .? Fulham's Paul Parker and Leroy Rosenior join Noel Blake in pensive mood.

You're never alone in a crowd - Vince Hilaire gets to know how Custer felt . . . .

A sweet moment - Neil Webb nips in to catch his old school-days friend Jeff Hopkins napping to chip in another goal.

The anatomy of a poacher's goal, Neil Webb's header comes back off the bar with Jim Stannard flat-footed. Alan Biley hurtles in and big Noel Blake loves every moment of it - and so does Biley.

continued on next page



You put your left knee up. Alan Biley and a Blackburn defender do a knees up.

January 5
POMPEY 0, BLACKBURN 0
F.A. Cup third round

This went down as the day Noel Blake's luck finally turned; the big centre-half for once was not punished for a mistake. And because of fate's sudden smile, Pompey lived to fight on in a replay at Blackburn.

Ball made two readily understandable changes for the match. Worried about his defence, he recalled Paul Hardyman at left-back and switched Mick Tait to the right at the expense of Gary Stanley who had battled gamely in a foreign position from the start of the season. He also called up Gerry Francis for his debut in midfield to allow Webb to continue his striking partnership with Biley.

But it was a disappointing match after the rip-roaring League event of a month earlier – though that was largely the result of a frosted pitch which offered no real foothold. Pompey generally looked the sharper side, but were able to mount little real hint of a goal, and with six minutes remaining it seemed Blake would be cruelly punished again. He chested a bouncing ball past Alan Knight and straight into the path of Rovers' top scorer Chris Thompson but to universal relief, Thompson somehow contrived to angle his shot wide of an empty net.

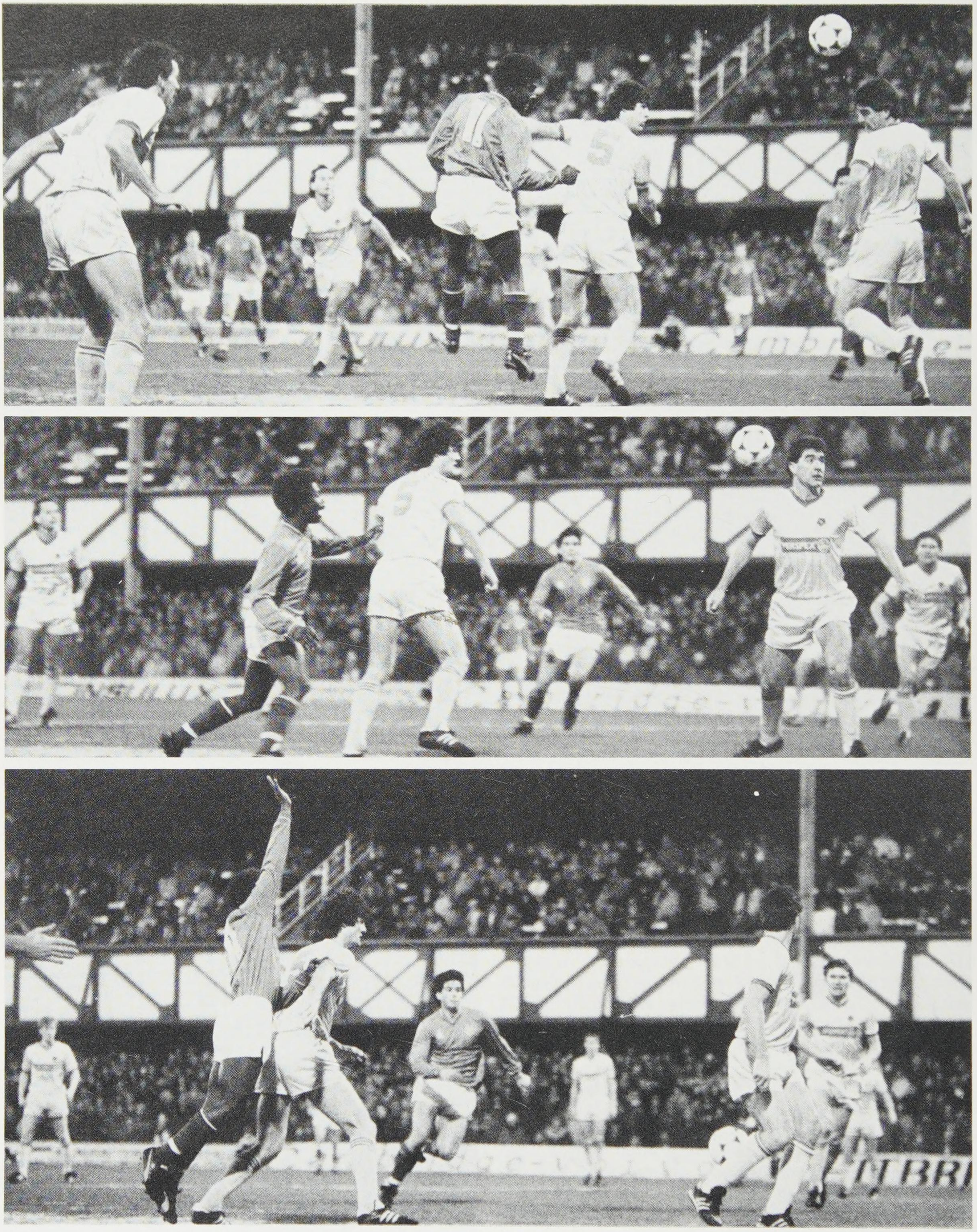
Pompey: Knight, Tait, Hardyman, Dillon, Blake, Waldron, Francis, Kennedy, Webb, Biley, Hilaire. Sub, Doyle.
Blackburn: Gennoe, Branagan, Rathbone, Barker, Keeley, Fazackerly, Miller, Randall, Thompson, Quinn, Brotherston. Sub, Lowey.
Referee: Tom Bune (Newbury). *Attendance:* 14,966.

The weather which had bitten deep to undermine hopes of a classic contest was to decree that three weeks were to pass before the sides had a chance to meet again at Ewood – in between the Lancashire club's pitch was ruled unfit seven times. On one occasion Pompey even got to the ground only to find that a tea-time blizzard had buried things. In fact Pompey were not to play for a fortnight, with Fratton Park icebound on the day they should have entertained Leeds United.

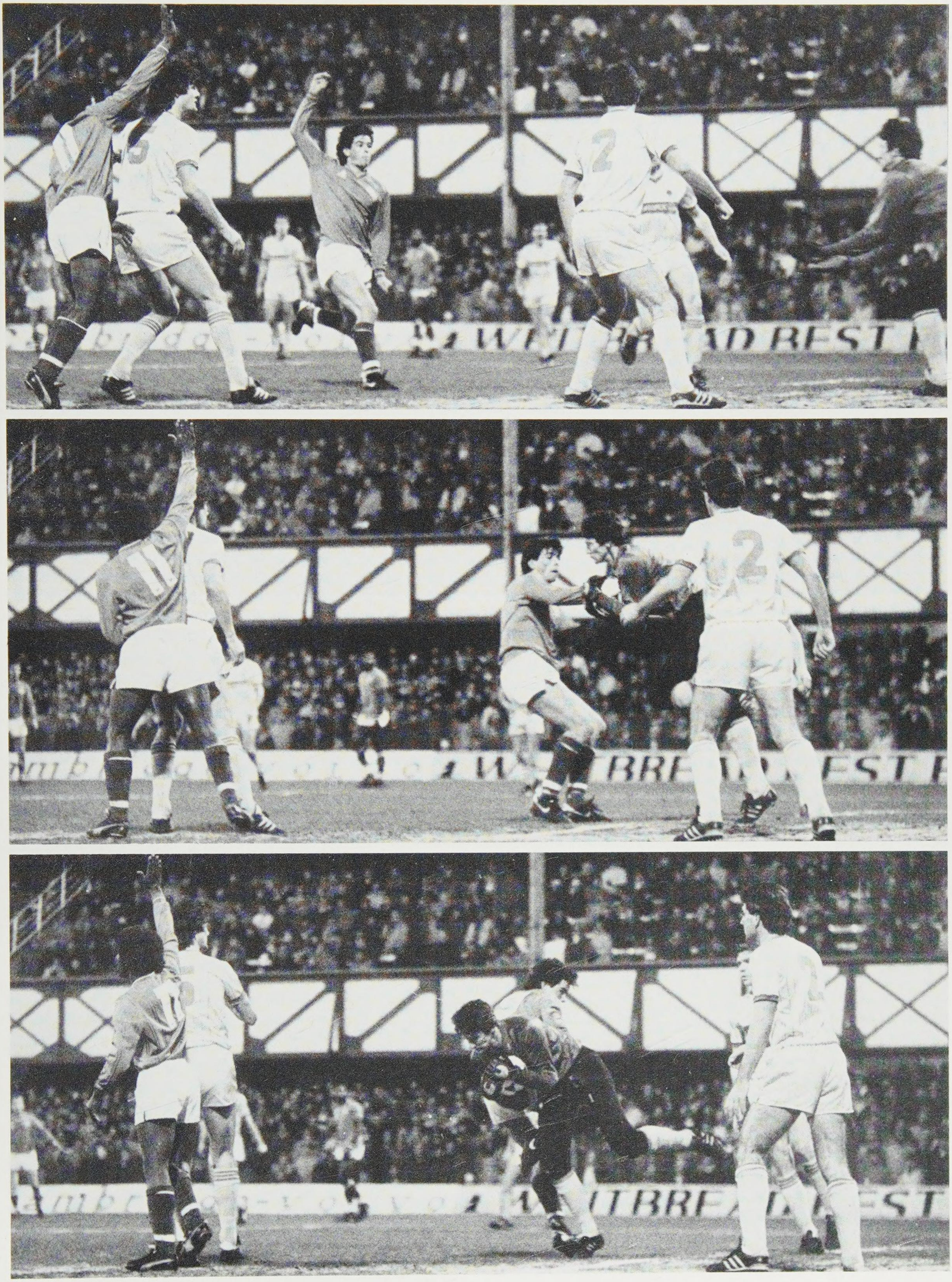
And by the time their visit to Middlesbrough was surprisingly reprieved by a sudden thaw, Ball had moved twice to strengthen his defence, and succeeded once. Ball's first move was to borrow Saints 34-year-old Yugoslav international full back Ivan Golac. But his attempt to sign Nottingham Forest's equally experienced Kenny Swain was sabotaged when Brian Clough, after initially agreeing to a loan period, changed his mind and asked a £25,000 fee which Pompey were not prepared to pay.

By the time Golac made his debut at Middlesbrough, Pompey had gained another string to their sporting bow – a basketball team. John Deacon had initially tried to buy the franchise of struggling Eastleigh-based Solent Stars but had been out-bid by a Southampton consortium. Undismayed, Pompey's chairman instead took over ailing Telford Turbos and moved them to Portsmouth with the firm intention of mounting a double challenge for sporting success.

'What me, ref. I never touched him.' Noel Blake in eloquent mood over the prostrate Terry Gennoe; Neil Webb and Alan Biley look slightly less certain, as does manager Alan Ball.



Vince Hilaire's header hits Jim Branagan's arms, Hilaire appeals, Webb reacts but so too does goalkeeper Terry Gennoe who wins out - and Hilaire goes on appealing in vain.



January 19
MIDDLESBROUGH 0, POMPEY 0

Not the most memorable of matches – but for Pompey a very significant one. For this slog over a mudheap marked the return after six weeks of Billy Gilbert – and the defence looked all the better for his return.

But it was also a controversial afternoon, soured for Pompey by the sending off of Kevin Dillon for an ugly first half clash with 'Boro skipper Irving Nattrass. Otherwise there was a refreshingly solid look about Pompey's defence with Noel Blake clearly happy to see his partner back and Golac making a more than useful debut.

Generally though it was a scrappy match with Pompey showing considerable resilience during their long spell with ten men to deny the home side a decent chance. They themselves had few opportunities although Neil Webb was robbed of one goal by an agile one-handed save by Kelham O'Hanlon.

Middlesbrough: O'Hanlon, Kay, Hamilton (Roberts), Buckley, Mowbray, Nattrass, Ward, Mills, Otto, Currie, McAndrew.
Pompey: Knight, Golac, Hardyman, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, Francis, Kennedy, Morgan, Webb, Hilaire. Sub, Tait.
Referee: John Hough (Macclesfield).
Attendance: 4,622.

That week-end saw another outbreak of 'Webb to go' stories; this time Queen's Park Rangers and Aston Villa were said to be lining up bids for him. Certainly Rangers' acting manager Frank Sibley had made the long drive from London to Tees-side to watch Webb at Middlesbrough. But once again Pompey denied there was any basis in fact to the headlines.

There was joy at last though for their School of Excellence ambitions. The F.A. had granted their request to set up a centre at Fratton Park in the autumn under the direction of long-serving Gordon Neave.

The week saw yet another Blackburn postponement – this time because of the tea-time blizzard – and by the time it went ahead at the week-end, Pompey had admitted that Q.P.R. were opening negotiations to sign Webb.

Mudlark Morgan - Nicky Morgan wages his one man war on Middlesbrough's defence on the Ayresome Park morass.

JACK H
LEAN HOMES

Cause and effect; Middlesbrough's Irving Nattress goes in high on Kevin Dillon at the start of the incident; next thing Nattress is down, referee John Hough ignores Neil Webb's appeal as Dillon is obscured by Middlesbrough's number 11 Tony McAndrew, and then starts the loneliest walk in soccer - to an early bath.

January 26
BLACKBURN 2, POMPEY 1
F.A. Cup third round replay

Pompey's dream of Cup glory and income died a sad death at Ewood Park. And, unhappily, it hinged once more on an error of judgement by Noel Blake. For 55 minutes Blake had been the king-pin of a sound defensive display, completely dominating the middle and denying Blackburn a clear sight of goal. Then he made the fatal mistake of changing his mind; he declined to hammer a ball into touch, trying to play it back to Alan Knight, but instead played it straight to Chris Thompson. Thompson who had spared Blake in the first meeting, showed no mercy this time, laying the ball off to Jimmy Quinn who hammered it home. Three minutes later and Pompey's cause was doomed as Quinn was left unmarked to volley home Noel Brotherston's cross.

Mick Kennedy, who was gradually developing into the commanding, demanding midfield influence Ball had promised on his signing, curled a spectacular first goal for the club from the edge of the penalty area, but it was too late to avert disappointment.

Generally though it was a drab, featureless match with Quinn's first goal coming from their first on-target effort of the afternoon while Pompey themselves had had only one. The match also saw Francis's contribution to Pompey's life cut short after a match and a half when he limped off with knee trouble early in the second half... the story of his life...!

Blackburn: Gennoe, Branagan, Rathbone (Hamilton), Barker, Mail, Fazackerly, Miller, Randell, Thompson, Quinn, Brotherston.
Pompey: Knight, Tait, Hardyman, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, Francis (McGarvey), Kennedy, Morgan, Webb, Hilaire.
Referee: Kieron Barrett (Coventry). *Attendance:* 12,017.

On the brighter side, though, Richard Money at last promised to move out of the injury shadows. The unlucky utility player made a safe return to action after 18 months of worry when he played 45 minutes of a low-key friendly against the Royal Navy youth team.

But Biley's discontent with life flared again and resulted in another transfer request. This time Ball recommended its acceptance and the board granted his wish. But the possible transfer of Webb to Q.P.R. was still in the air with Pompey apparently preferring an exchange deal.

A frustrating month ended with another recruitment – O'Callaghan, the subject of those denied rumours in late autumn, joined on a month's loan. As he did so Money stepped up his bid for fitness by playing the entire match as Pompey beat Aldershot 3-0 in the semi final of the Hampshire Professional Cup.

One into two will go. Vince Hilaire takes on Blackburn's Mike Rathbone and Noel Brotherston and leaves them for dead.

POMPEY

8. February 1985

Neil Webb provided fans with a surprise boost to start the month. Webb, Pompey's leading scorer, turned down a chance to fulfil his ambitions of First Division football with Q.P.R. after the clubs had agreed a fee of £250,000. "I don't think it is the right move for me; I would like to stay to see if I can achieve my ambition at Fratton," he said.

But delight at that news was quickly offset by events on the pitch as Pompey contrived to lose at home for the second time.

February 2
POMPEY 0, CHARLTON 1

One of those classic occasions when one team dominates and the other wins. Pompey were without Kevin Dillon, starting the two match ban for his Middlesbrough sending off, and Webb switched back into midfield. Ivan Golac made his home debut at right back and O'Callaghan his first appearance. Pompey spent almost the entire match encamped in Charlton's half, but all their pressure had little real result.

McGarvey, in possibly his sharpest performance for the club, had one shot well saved by the impressive Nicky Johns and drifted another just over the bar, but the two best chances fell to Vince Hilaire, one hooked wide with the other hitting a post from close range.

Charlton had been content to try to survive the pressure but then with only ten minutes remaining caught Pompey cold with a classic counter-punch. Veteran Ronnie Moore controlled the ball on the left and Mike Flanagan for once out jumped the otherwise assured Billy Gilbert to loop a header gently inside the far post... and suddenly Pompey were seven points adrift of the four clubs above them...

Pompey: Knight, Golac, Hardyman, Webb, Blake, Gilbert, Hilaire, Kennedy, Morgan (Tait 69), O'Callaghan, McGarvey.
Charlton: Johns, Curtis, Friar, Gritt, Dowman, Berry, Lee, Curbishley, Moore, Anderson, Flanagan. Sub, Dickenson.
Referee: Ken Baker (Rugby).
Attendance: 12,319.

And then it was shop-window time for Biley who turned out for the reserves and scored as they beat Watford 2-0 – but only one prospective buyer took the trouble to watch; Stoke's Bill Asprey. Biley duly travelled to the Midlands to talk to Asprey, but left without reaching any agreement on terms.

Meanwhile Ball faced a critical challenge; Pompey had not won a match since their improbable success against Oxford before Christmas and four of the seven goals they had managed in seven matches since then had come on New Year's Day against Fulham. And to add to his problems, Webb his one consistent scorer was unfit as they travelled to meet Barnsley.

February 9
BARNSLEY 2, POMPEY 2

The day things really went right for Noel Blake – an outstanding defensive performance capped by a dramatic last minute goal which earned a priceless point for a battling side.

It was a desperate day; the pitch partially snow covered, partially frozen and raked by an Arctic gale which made playing and watching a miserable endurance test. Ball answered his striking crisis by promoting big Dave Bamber to partner Scott McGarvey and called up Gerry Francis for another midfield outing. Both played their part in a game performance in adverse conditions but the man who dominated the show was Blake as Barnsley, unbeaten at home since the first day of the season, chased victory behind a barrage of long balls.

Pompey in fact led at half time with Bamber's burly presence at the far post for a corner inducing defensive confusion which ended with Paul Futcher nodding the ball against the back of his full back Nick Laws' head

from where it flew into the net. The lead survived for ten frantic minutes until Blake's headed clearance fell for Winston Campbell to tuck a shot through a crowd of players and into the bottom corner. Pompey were still gamely level with seven minutes to go, but then Rodger Wylde controlled a rebound off Golac and fired home a shot off the inside of a post.

With Mick Kennedy having been booked and doomed to a two match ban, it looked like being a bleak trip home but then with seconds left, Blake stormed forward, powered a precision cross from Kevin O'Callaghan against the bar and thundered in the rebound.

Barnsley: Baker, Joyce, Laws, Ronson, Goodison, Paul Futcher, Owen, Thomas, Ron Futcher, Wylde, Campbell. Sub, Walsh.
Pompey: Knight, Golac, Hardyman, Francis, Blake, Gilbert, Hilaire (Tait), Kennedy, Bamber, O'Callaghan, McGarvey.
Referee: Ken Redfern (Whitley Bay).
Attendance: 7,382.

Golac's loan period had now been extended by two months and suddenly there was a chance of Biley playing again. His talks with Stoke had borne no fruit and with Pompey keen to use him as bait to capture Bertschin and the Football League apparently none too keen since Stoke had not paid Norwich for Bertschin, there was a possibility Biley would play at Notts County.

The weather however removed that decision from Ball – the Meadow Lane pitch was unfit and Pompey again kicked their heels. But Biley was to play twice more before he got his wish to move on. With the Stoke deal still in the air, Ball linked Biley and Bamber for the visit of Oldham to Fratton Park.

February 23
POMPEY 5, OLDHAM 1

Pompey's biggest win since Alan Ball's managerial take-over for the last match of the previous season saw a devastating demonstration of the killer instinct they had been lacking. Oldham were a struggling side but unlike other strugglers who had visited Fratton, were not allowed to escape.

Biley's recall was one of four changes from the side which had battled so hard at Barnsley. Kevin Dillon replaced the suspended Mick Kennedy, Neil Webb also returned in midfield with Gerry Francis once more injured and when Kevin O'Callaghan damaged a knee in the final training session, Bobby Doyle found himself back in the side. O'Callaghan's injury meant he had played only twice in a month's loan and left Ball with the job of persuading Ipswich to extend the period to allow the winger to prove his worth before the move could become permanent, and also cost him his recall to the Republic of Ireland side for a friendly in Cyrpus.

Pompey were in control from the start but needed 28 minutes to take the lead. Then Vince Hilaire, who had an outstanding match, was brought down and Dillon calmly converted the penalty. Ten minutes later full back John Bowden found himself penalized again for halting Biley's run. This time Andy Goram guessed right and saved Dillon's kick only to be penalized for going early and the second time Dillon calmly beat him. A minute from the interval Biley struck for the first time flicking home Hilaire's cross at the far post to give Pompey a healthy three goal lead.

Early in the second half Pompey found themselves protesting at a penalty, as Brendan O'Callaghan went down under Knight's challenge as he chased Billy Gilbert's underhit back pass, but when the debate was ended, Tony Henry sent Knight the wrong way to make it 3-1. But there was no chance this was to be another Fulham...

Six minutes after that goal, Biley gave another devastating demonstration of his art of being in the right place at the right time. Goram allowed a fierce shot by Hilaire to bounce off his chest and before he could recover, Biley had darted in and his 13th goal of the season was in the back of the net. Now the crowd willed him to his hat trick; twice shots screwed wide and then when it seemed Webb's cross might set him up, Hilaire intercepted and crowned his best performance for the club with a blinding shot.

Pompey: Knight, Golac, Hardyman, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Dillon, Bamber, Biley, Hilaire. Sub, Tait.
Oldham: Goram, Bowden, Donachie, McDonough, Hoolickin, McGuire, Ward, Henry, O'Callaghan, Colville, Barlow (Clements).
Referee: Darry Reeves (Uxbridge).
Attendance: 11,108.

As the month ended, Ipswich agreed to allow O'Callaghan to stay and prove himself and Gary Stanley, displaced by Golac's loan, talked over a move to Crystal Palace but failed to reach agreement.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

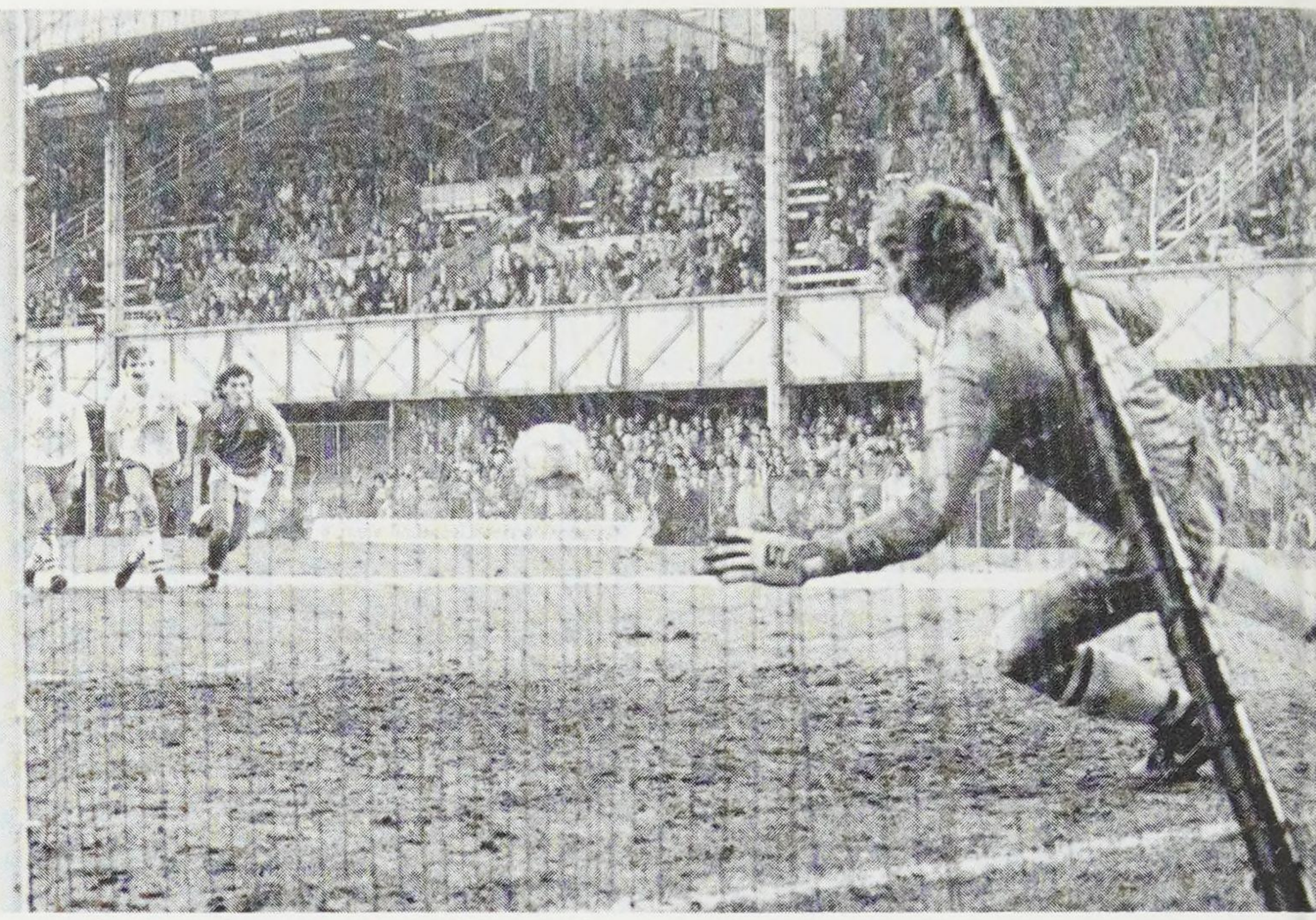
		Home Goals					Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Blackburn	27	10	2	1	29	11	5	6	3	22	15	53
Man City	28	10	2	2	27	11	5	5	4	18	13	52
Oxford	24	10	1	0	39	9	5	4	4	14	11	50
Birmingham	25	5	4	2	14	10	10	0	4	20	12	49
POMPEY	27	8	4	2	29	17	4	6	3	17	19	46
Leeds	27	8	5	2	29	10	5	1	6	18	20	45
Brighton	27	7	4	2	16	7	5	2	7	13	15	42
Fulham	27	10	0	3	27	17	3	3	8	22	31	42
Shrewsbury	26	8	3	2	30	17	3	5	5	17	20	41
Grimsby	27	9	1	5	30	20	3	4	5	19	22	41
Huddersfield	27	7	2	5	19	20	5	3	5	18	18	41
Barnsley	25	7	3	2	18	9	3	7	3	11	11	40

No one was to know it, but this was an historic goal by Alan Biley, his last for the club. His header beats Andy Goram who desperately wraps himself around his tormentor as Biley turns triumphantly away.

C. & J. BRAN & SON L

& JOHN DEAN & SON L

Watch the man on the left. Noel Blake is preparing to shoot but Vince Hilaire nips in first, Oldham's goalkeeper Andy Goram is beaten and Blake watches in horror as the shot goes wide - Hilaire can't bear to look.



A master at work. Kevin Dillon, Pompey's penalty perfectionist, sends Andy Goram the wrong way.

Three-nil. Biley flicks his blond locks and Oldham can only stand and watch.

POMPEY

9. March 1985

Colin Sullivan was happy to see March arrive – he could at last start his season. Two months after an operation on his ankle, the veteran full back finally played a full reserve team match without difficulty. But there was still little about the first team which suggested they could make their chairman's dream and manager's forecast come true as they faced relegation-haunted Wolves at a near deserted Molyneux.

March 2
WOLVES 0, POMPEY 0

Very much a case of after the Lord Mayor's Show... Pompey never looked the side who had thrashed Oldham the previous week. Ball again paired Dave Bamber and Alan Biley up front, but where they had constantly troubled Oldham, they never disturbed Wolves' defence.

In fact Pompey had only one real chance of earning the victory Ball had insisted was a must. Midway through the first half Noel Blake was in the clear behind Wolves' defence as a long Ivan Golac pass found him slow in getting back after a corner. But goalkeeper Tim Flowers came out on top in their one-and-one confrontation and it was not until the last few minutes that Pompey came close again when Kevin Dillon dipped a free kick against the bar. In between Wolves, who had not scored a League goal at home since mid-November, had Alan Knight to blame for their failure to do so.

Wolves: Flowers, Humphrey, Barnes, Chapman, Zelem, Herbert, Ainscow, Cartwright, Eastoe, Langley, King. Sub, Coady.
Pompey: Knight, Golac, Waldron, Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, Webb, Dillon, Bamber, Biley, Hilaire. Sub, Ball.
Referee: D. Scott (Burnley).
Attendance: 7,985.

That unconvincing performance was a sad curtain to Biley's career at Fratton. For by the end of the week he had gone – a short distance down the road to Brighton. Pompey's board took a calculated risk in deciding to accept Brighton's £60,000 offer; for the Sussex club were also in with a chance of promotion. But, they were the only people to have made an offer, and so the deal went through.

But it made the visit of Wimbledon to Fratton one of the most crucial of the year, for directors and manager. Pompey had to win to maintain their promotion impetus and to defuse possible reaction from Biley's legion of admirers.

March 9
POMPEY 1, WIMBLEDON 0

Neil Webb, Biley's closest friend, was the man who gave club and manager the win they so badly needed. He was pushed back into attack to cover Biley's departure and poached the only goal early on when he got up well above three defenders to meet a long throw by Mick Kennedy and loop his header just inside the far post. But one goal was a poor reward for a battling performance which contrasted sharply with the display at Molyneux.

The man who master-minded the transformation was skipper Kennedy. Back from two weeks suspension, his aggression and determination rubbed off on those around him and Pompey at times threatened to overwhelm a Wimbledon side who were leg-weary from a week of F.A. Cup replays.

The real bonus though came with the results from elsewhere – Blackburn lost at Oldham, Oxford could get no more than a point at Sheffield, and Pompey were suddenly only three points off third place.

Pompey: Knight, Golac, Hardyman, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan, Kennedy, Bamber, Webb, Hilaire. Sub, Tait.
Wimbledon: Beasant, Gage, Winterburn, Galliers, Morris, Martin, Evans, Fishenden, Cork (Downes), Sanchez, Fairweather.
Referee: Roger Milford (Bristol).
Attendance: 11,444.

Going in where it hurts, Noel Blake brushes aside two Wolves defenders to Dave Bamber's obvious surprise but the header went just too high.

Tip-toe through the defenders . . . Neil Webb tries dancing through two 'Dons.'

Hair flying big Dave Bamber rumbles through.

Pompey's determination to turn their dream into fact was underlined when chairman Deacon revealed that their search for new players, and particularly for a proven goal-scorer, had taken in Paul Mariner and Garry Thompson, but neither Arsenal or West Bromwich were prepared to sell. At the same time they admitted that the signing of Scott McGarvey had not worked out and the young Scotsman was transfer-listed.

March 12
POMPEY 3, LEEDS UNITED 1

Pompey thrust themselves back into the heart of the promotion race with victory over rivals Leeds in an absorbing, fiercely contested match. Leeds had gone nine matches without losing to revive hopes of a return to the First Division, but in a superb duel were outgunned by a side inspired by Kevin Dillon's magnificent performance.

The win took Pompey's points haul to 11 from a possible 15, brought them level with third-placed Blackburn and, thanks to Carlisle's shock victory over Birmingham, only two behind the Midlanders. Everything at the start revolved around Dillon – inside 12 minutes he had scored, become the first of eight players booked and had had a penalty saved. His goal came after only 38 seconds, his shot from a cross by Kevin O'Callaghan taking a deflection to beat Mervyn Day. In the 12th minute Day took his revenge, saving Dillon's penalty after Neil Webb had been fouled – a save which delayed the second goal by only 60 seconds. Then Nicky Morgan, reinstated to partner Webb, powered home a header from Paul Hardyman's cross.

Leeds pulled themselves back into the match in the 35th minute, Alan Knight beating out Peter Lorimer's penalty only to see John Sheridan follow up to score.

Pompey's third goal arrived in the 80th minute with the match now a niggly affair; Morgan dummied over an angled shot by O'Callaghan and it crept just inside the post. But there was time for more drama – and another saved penalty. In the last minutes Leeds substitute Tommy Wright was brought down but for the second time Knight read Lorimer's intention and beat away the shot.

Pompey: Knight, Golac (Tait), Hardyman, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan, Kennedy, Morgan, Webb, Hilaire.
Leeds: Day, Irwin, Hamson (Wright), Sellars, Linighan, Brown, Baird, Sheridan, Ritchie, Lorimer, Gray.
Referee: Colin Downey (Hounslow).
Attendance: 16,208.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

		Home Goals					Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Man City	30	11	2	2	28	11	6	5	4	19	13	58
Birmingham	29	6	4	3	16	12	11	0	5	24	14	55
Blackburn	30	10	2	2	29	12	5	6	5	23	20	53
POMPEY	30	10	4	2	33	18	4	7	3	17	19	53
Oxford	27	10	1	1	39	12	5	5	5	15	13	51
Fulham	30	11	1	3	30	19	4	3	8	24	31	49
Leeds	31	8	6	2	29	10	5	3	7	21	25	48
Grimsby	30	10	1	5	36	23	4	5	5	21	23	48
Brighton	29	9	4	2	20	8	5	2	7	13	15	48
Shrewsbury	29	9	4	2	36	19	3	5	6	17	21	45
Huddersfield	30	8	2	5	21	20	5	4	6	19	23	45

Kevin O'Callaghan (far right), Nicky Morgan and Leeds defender Andy Linighan watch as O'Callaghan's long range shot creeps past Mervyn Day's dive.

Leeds defender Tony Brown turns away - Neil Webb turns turtle and Pompey have a penalty; and 'Dill' meets his match - Mervyn Day wins the guessing game and beats away the kick.

Radio VICTORY
SPORTS MAIL
YOU CAN'T BEAT A WINNING TEAM
POOLES
Hendy Lennox

Radio VICTORY
SPORTS MAIL
YOU CAN'T BEAT A WINNING TEAM
POOLES

Suddenly all Portsmouth believed the prize could still be their's. But reluctantly Pompey admitted how close they had been to writing themselves off. For after the win against Leeds it was revealed that defeat would have turned it into Neil Webb's farewell party. Pompey, for the second time, had accepted Q.P.R.'s £250,000 offer for their top scorer and had only withdrawn acceptance after Leeds had been nailed.

Four days later and Pompey had made it three wins in a row by completing the double over Grimsby - and suddenly Pompey were in third place, deprived of second only by goal difference.

March 16
GRIMSBY 2, POMPEY 3

It was a performance of considerable character and skill which allowed them to leave Blundell Park for the second year in a row with a win bonus. And like the clash of 12 months earlier, it was an absorbing contest. Again the flourishing midfield partnership of Mick Kennedy and Kevin Dillon played a crucial part but it was the gutsy performance of Nicky Morgan in winning a physical match-long duel with Chris Nicholl which was ultimately decisive.

Pompey took the lead in the 34th minute after a spell of arrogant control, with a disputed penalty after Kevin Moore had handled a net-bound shot by Noel Blake to give Dillon another successful conversion. But Grimsby equalized through Bob Cumming just before the interval only for Pompey to strike again in the 50th minute, Vince Hilaire nodding home after Morgan's effort rebounded off the bar. Morgan's own reward came five minutes later when he took a return pass from Neil Webb and eased home his sixth goal of the season. Grimsby quickly made it 3-2 with a fine goal by Paul Wilkinson but Pompey's defence, backed by the calm handling of Alan Knight, clung on to the points.

Grimsby: Felgate, Robinson, Crombie, Foley, Nicholl, Moore (Emson), Ford, Wilkinson, Drinkell, Bonnyman, Cumming.
Pompey: Knight, Tait, Hardyman, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan (Doyle), Kennedy, Morgan, Webb, Hilaire.
Referee: J. McAulay (Leeds).
Attendance: 6,197.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

	Home Goals						Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Man City	31	12	2	2	32	11	6	5	4	19	13	61
Blackburn	31	11	2	2	31	13	5	6	5	23	20	56
POMPEY	31	10	4	2	33	18	5	7	3	20	21	56
Oxford	29	11	1	1	43	12	5	6	5	15	13	55
Birmingham	30	6	4	3	16	12	11	0	6	25	16	55
Leeds	32	9	6	2	31	10	5	3	7	21	25	51
Brighton	31	9	5	2	20	8	5	3	7	13	15	50
Fulham	31	11	2	3	30	19	4	3	8	24	31	50
Grimsby	31	10	1	6	38	26	4	5	5	21	23	48

Anyone seen Nicky Morgan; Neil Webb and Vince Hilaire make their feelings clear at Morgan's goal.

Take that. Nicky Morgan thunders in to beat Kevin Moore.

Neil Webb shoots only for a defender to handle to give Dead-eye Dillon another penalty chance and Nigel Batch is beaten to Dillon's obvious delight.

Follow me. Neil Webb leads two Grimsby defenders a merry dance.

Future Saints manager is the meat in the sandwich - Chris Nicholl comes off second best between Noel Blake and Nicky Morgan.

Grimsby's Bob Cumming winces as Mick Tait makes a point.

He flies through the air . . . Paul Hardyman in balletic pose.

Mick Kennedy arrives just too late to prevent Grimsby's Paul Wilkinson getting in a shot.

Neil Webb and Paul Hardyman were called up for England under 21 squad.

Another boost for the club quickly followed – three players honoured at under 21 level. Neil Webb and Paul Hardyman were called up for the England squad to meet the Republic of Ireland at Fratton with Mick Kennedy included in the Irish party by Eoin Hand. England's call was later to bring Alan Ball into head on collision with Bobby Robson. But the week ended with the departure of Colin Sullivan. His time as club captain had been one of frustrated injury without an appearance and he was allowed to join struggling Swansea City on a free transfer.

March 23
POMPEY 0, CARDIFF 0

Pompey's bid for a fourth successive victory – and second place in the table – blew up at Fratton Park. They scorned two early chances – Noel Blake firing horribly high after goalkeeper Gary Plumley had dropped a cross, and then Nicky Morgan dragging a close range shot off target.

After that Pompey were never able to crack a massed defence and towards the end, Cardiff, whose ambition extended no further than not losing, might even have snatched an improbable victory. But from 30 yards Dave Boden's shot at an empty net curled into the side netting.

But at least results elsewhere went Pompey's way – Blackburn were thrashed by Shrewsbury and Birmingham held at home by Brighton, to allow Pompey to hang on to third place.

Pompey: Knight, Golac, Hardyman, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan, Kennedy, Morgan, Webb, Hilaire. Sub, Tait.
Cardiff: Plumley, King, Mullen, Gibbins, Ford, Tong, McLoughlin, Meacock, Vaughan, Withey, Bodin. Sub, Francis Ford.
Referee: Keith Miller (Harlow).
Attendance: 13,620.

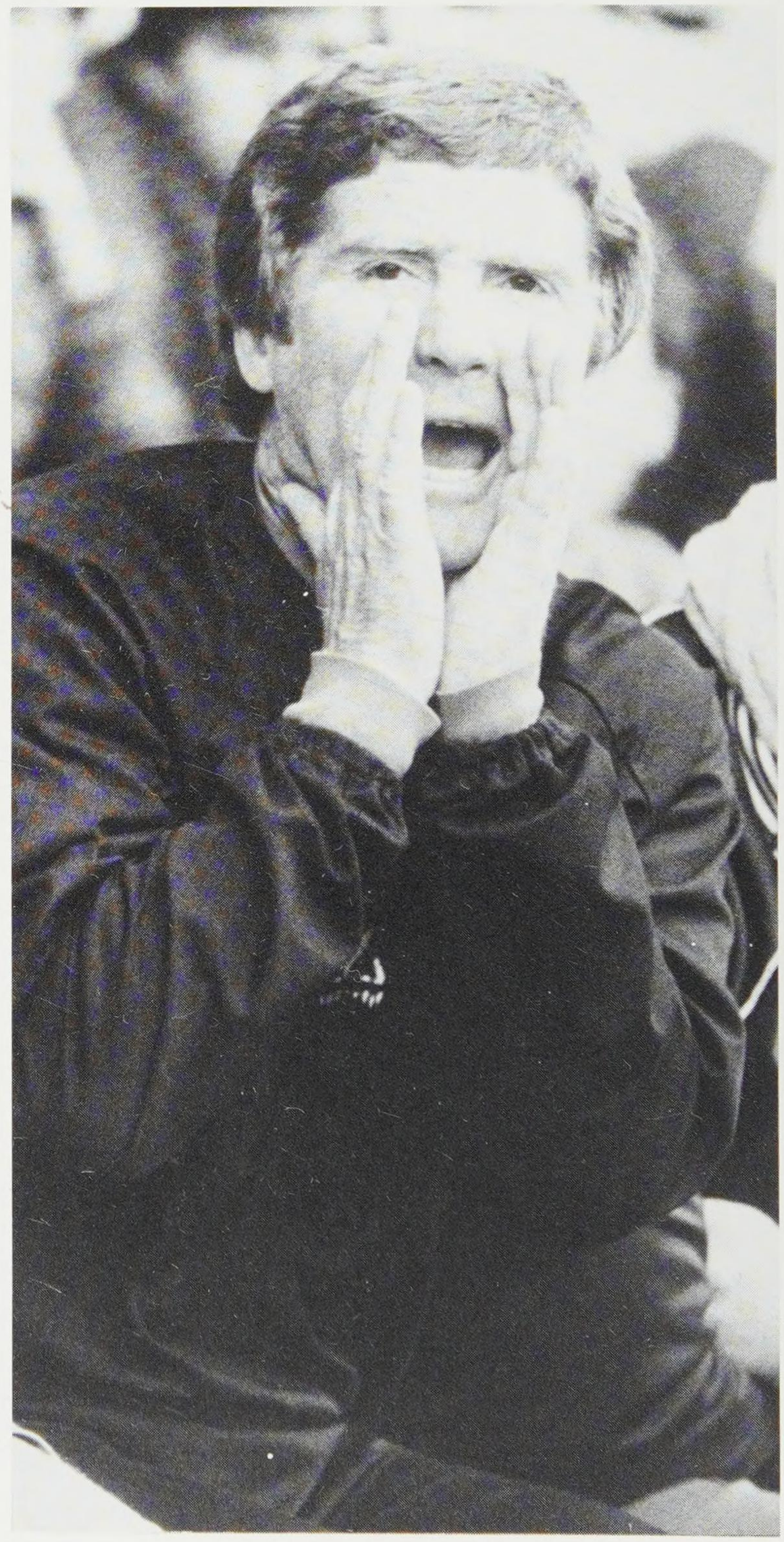
Top of the Table
DIVISION II

		Home Goals					Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Man City	33	12	2	2	32	11	6	6	5	19	16	62
Oxford	30	12	1	1	46	12	5	6	5	15	13	58
POMPEY	32	10	5	2	33	18	5	7	3	20	21	57
Birmingham	32	6	6	3	17	13	11	0	6	25	16	57
Blackburn	32	11	2	2	31	13	5	6	6	23	23	56
Leeds	33	9	6	2	31	10	5	3	8	22	27	51
Brighton	32	9	5	2	20	8	5	4	7	14	16	51
Fulham	32	11	2	3	30	19	4	4	8	26	33	51
Shrewsbury	31	10	4	2	39	19	3	5	7	17	25	48
Grimsby	32	10	1	6	38	26	4	5	6	21	25	48

Transfer deadline week provoked more Mariner for Pompey stories, but again they were refuted by Mr. Deacon. Pompey's only activity was to clinch the permanent signing of Kevin O'Callaghan and to fail to reach financial agreement with Ivan Golac who returned to the Dell. There might have been one other departure from the Park, but Dave Bamber turned down a move to Third Division Bolton.

The under 21 international turned into quite a Pompey party. England, captained by Webb and with Hardyman outstanding, won 3-2 with a curious slant given by the Republic's goals. Both were penalties converted clinically by Mick Kennedy – one conceded by Hardyman, the other by Webb.

Alan Ball in head on collision with England Manager Bobby Robson.



Arm in arm together . . . . You don't mind, do you Graham? Noel Blake and Cardiff's Graham Withey in close harmony.

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Oh Noel. Blake is on his own, but the ball 'won't come down' and by the time it does Roger Gibbins has got across to block the shot.

March 30
SHREWSBURY 0, POMPEY 0

Pompey stretched their unbeaten run to eight matches – but it cost them three places in the table. Failure to take their chances in a lively contest with a side whose beaten guests included Birmingham, Manchester City and most recently Blackburn, saw them slip to fifth place in a race which was rapidly assuming Snakes and Ladders proportions.

Once again Pompey's lack of a real cutting edge up front betrayed them and although their football was often attractive, it carried little real punch. In the end they might have suffered the fate of their three promotion rivals without two fine saves by Alan Knight.

Shrewsbury: Perks, Williams, Johnson, Maclaren, Griffin, Petts, McNally, Hackett, Stevens, Robinson, Tester. Sub, Kerr.
Pompey: Knight, Tait, Hardyman (Stanley), Doyle, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan, Kennedy, Morgan, Webb, Hilaire.
Referee: Gary Aplin (Kendal).
Attendance: 4,140.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

		Home Goals					Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Man City	34	12	3	2	34	13	6	6	5	19	16	63
Oxford	31	13	1	1	47	12	5	6	5	15	13	61
Birmingham	33	7	6	3	18	13	11	0	6	25	16	60
Blackburn	33	12	2	2	32	13	5	6	6	23	23	59
POMPEY	33	10	5	2	33	18	5	8	3	20	21	58
Leeds	34	9	6	2	31	10	6	3	8	24	27	54
Brighton	33	10	5	2	22	8	5	4	7	14	16	54
Fulham	33	11	2	4	30	21	4	4	8	26	33	51
Shrewsbury	33	10	5	2	39	19	3	5	8	18	29	49
Huddersfield	32	9	3	5	25	23	5	4	6	19	23	49
Grimsby	33	10	1	6	38	26	4	5	7	21	26	48

You need eyes in the back of your head in this game; Neil Webb's head blocks Nicky Morgan's header.

Oh that hurt. Bobby Doyle gets a Shrewsbury boot across the shin.

Hey. There's a man on my back. Paul Hardyman takes an unwanted burden at the Gay Meadow.

Gary Stanley gets his chance to prove a point as substitute at Shrewsbury.

Hallelujah . . . .

POMPEY

10. April 1985

The Shrewsbury match came as Ball set his scoring target for the remaining ten matches of the season – a minimum of 20. But there was a speedy chance of atonement – and a chance which was eagerly accepted at Meadow Lane.

April 2
NOTTS COUNTY 1, POMPEY 3

Those successive goal-less draws had set the whispers going about Pompey's ability to stay the course; here Ball's team roared their reply. They produced the commitment and football which had swept Leeds aside a fortnight earlier – and three of the goals Ball had demanded. It was a night of exciting, hungry football, spearheaded by a masterly display of trickery and imagination from Vince Hilaire and two more goals by reluctant striker Neil Webb.

But it also left Webb wondering whether he was destined never to score a hat trick. Both his goals came in a first half which Pompey had totally dominated and in the second he twice found himself in one-and-one situations with goalkeeper Mick Leonard and each time lost out.

Pompey could not have made a better start. In little more than a minute they were in front. Kevin O'Callaghan took the night's first corner and Noel Blake's late run ended with a powerful header into the top corner. Now Hilaire and Webb took over. Hilaire lost and regained possession on the line and although Webb's shot from his cross was blocked by Leonard, the youngster followed up to whip home his second effort. Then ten minutes from the interval the pair linked devastatingly again. Hilaire controlled a difficult ball outside County's penalty area, beat one challenge, dummied former England centre-half Dave Watson and his low cross was forced home by Webb. But before half time County had been allowed to reduce the lead with a sloppy goal as Watson clipped a ball into the penalty area for Rachid Harkouk to roll home.

Pompey were without Kennedy for the second half and survived difficult moments early and late – both times thanks to Alan Knight. Each time Knight's brilliant saves frustrated County's Tristan Benjamin. That apart though, they were never troubled and had Webb had marginally better luck, the scoreline would have reflected the disparity between sides more accurately.

Notts County: Leonard, Richards, Davis (Waitt), Goodwin, Watson, Sims, Harkouk, Fashanu, Daws, Benjamin, Robinson.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan, Kennedy (Doyle), Morgan, Webb, Hilaire.
Referee: R. Guy (Kirkby).
Attendance: 5,631.

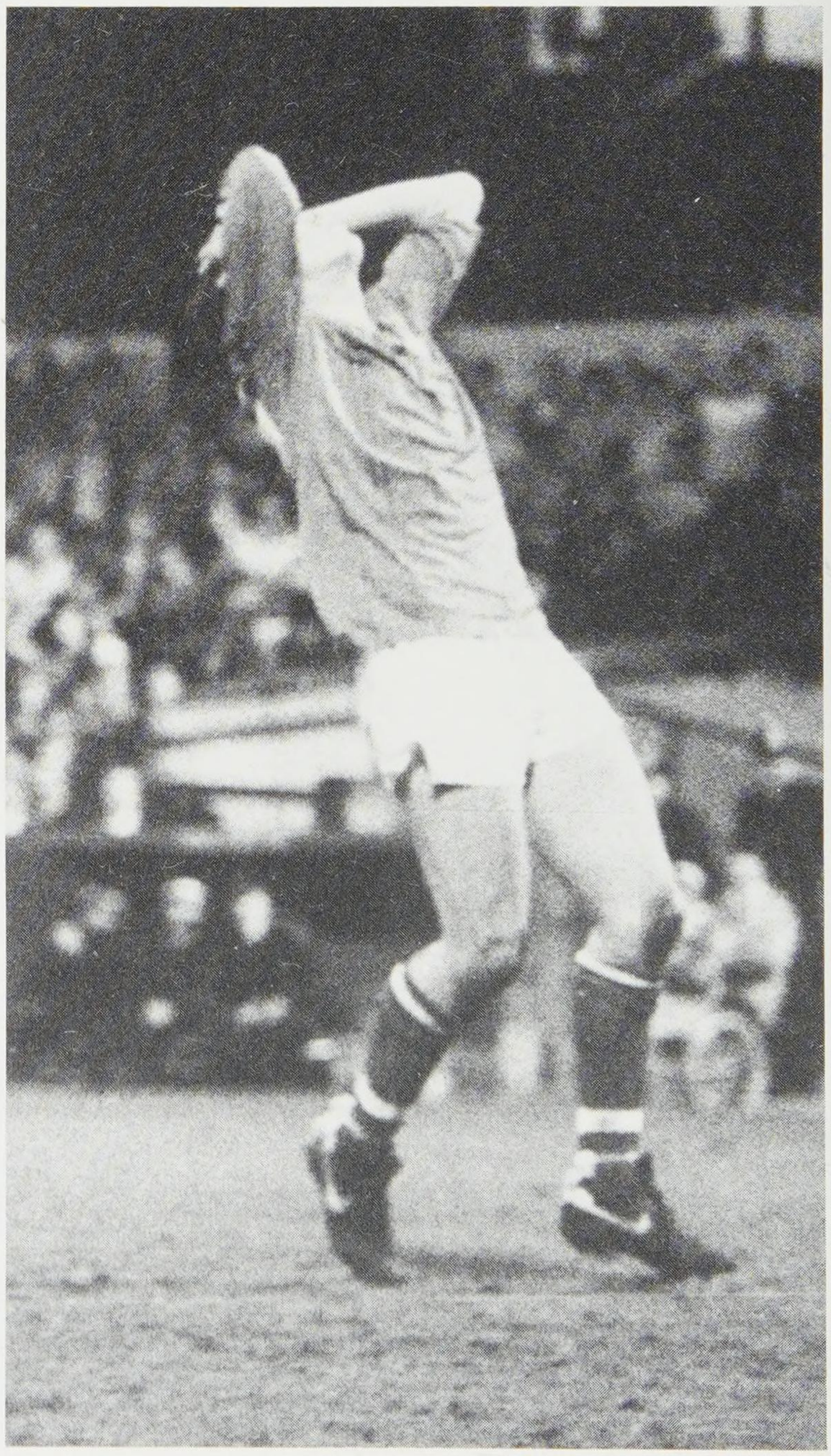
Top of the Table
DIVISION II

	Home Goals						Away Goals						
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Man City	34	12	3	2	34	13	6	6	5	19	16	63
Oxford	32	13	1	1	47	12	5	6	6	15	16	61
POMPEY	34	10	5	2	33	18	6	8	3	23	22	61
Birmingham	33	7	6	3	18	13	11	0	6	25	16	60
Blackburn	33	12	2	2	32	13	5	6	6	23	23	59
Brighton	34	10	5	2	22	8	5	5	7	15	17	55
Leeds	34	9	6	2	31	10	6	3	8	24	27	54
Fulham	33	11	2	4	30	21	4	4	8	26	33	51
Barnsley	32	10	4	2	25	10	3	7	6	14	20	50

So Easter, that traditional time of answered soccer questions arrived – and answered very little. It began with Pompey in third place and finished with their golden run since that late Blake goal at Barnsley stretched to 11 matches – 11 matches which had brought 23 out of a possible 33 points – and second place.

Not a bad way to start a match. Noel Blake strikes and half Notts County's team are helpless.

Allez-oops. Neil Webb goes bicycling under Steve Sims' nose.



It's one and one again - and again Neil Webb can only hold his head in despair as that elusive hat trick eludes him again.

Out of the way brother. Vince Hilaire muscling his way past Steve Sims to set up Neil Webb's first goal.

April 6
POMPEY 1, BRIGHTON 1

Easter began with a match billed as Biley's return. But in the end, the fair-haired former idol played only a subsidiary role in a contest which failed to reach its expected quality. Yet he might have been instrumental in the destruction of the unbeaten run which had hoisted his old club back into the heart of the intense race for the season's spoils. There were only ten minutes remaining with the score deadlocked when Biley, suffering from a slight injury, got away, rode a heavy tackle by Billy Gilbert and Alan Knight could only push away the cross. Big Mick Ferguson controlled and shot only for Knight to extend himself into a magnificent save to preserve the run and a point.

Pompey had dominated the match before the interval but had only one goal for their efforts – although that was a magnificent affair. Gary Stanley's forward pass was laid off by Nicky Morgan for Webb to bring it under control and instantly thrash home with Graham Moseley helpless. Before the interval Moseley had denied Webb a second goal, somehow finding the extra inches to get his finger tips to a delicately flighted chip which seemed to be drifting in under the bar.

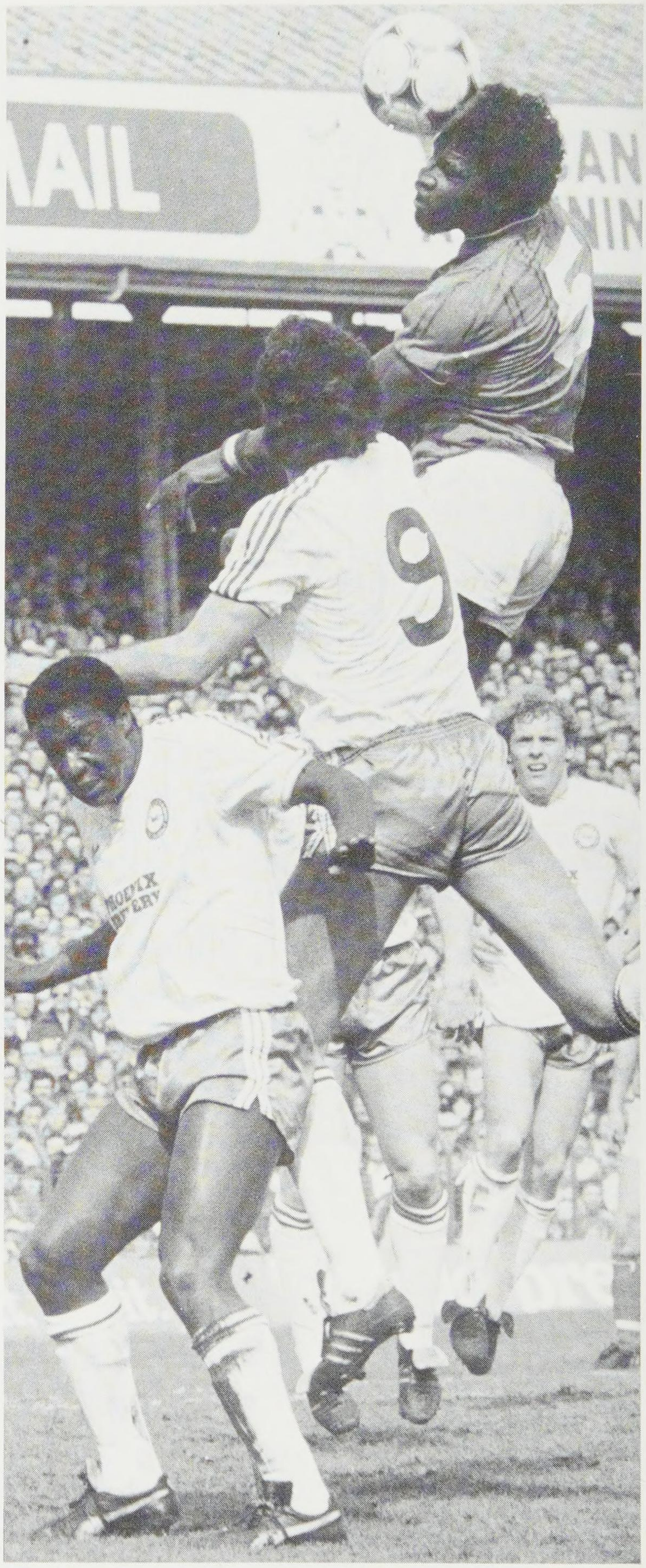
But shortly after half time, luck again ran out for Noel Blake. The big man had been outstanding in the middle of the defence as Brighton's attack had been snuffed out, but under pressure from Ferguson as a fierce cross from Danny Wilson flashed across Knight, Blake could do no more than deflect it home – a blow from which Pompey's early bounce never recovered.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan, Kennedy, Morgan, Webb, Hilaire. Sub, Doyle.
Brighton: Moseley, Keown, Hutchings, Pearce, Young, O'Reilly, Wilson, Biley, Ferguson, Connor, Smillie. Sub, Kraay.
Referee: Dennis Hodges (Oxford).
Attendance: 22,867.

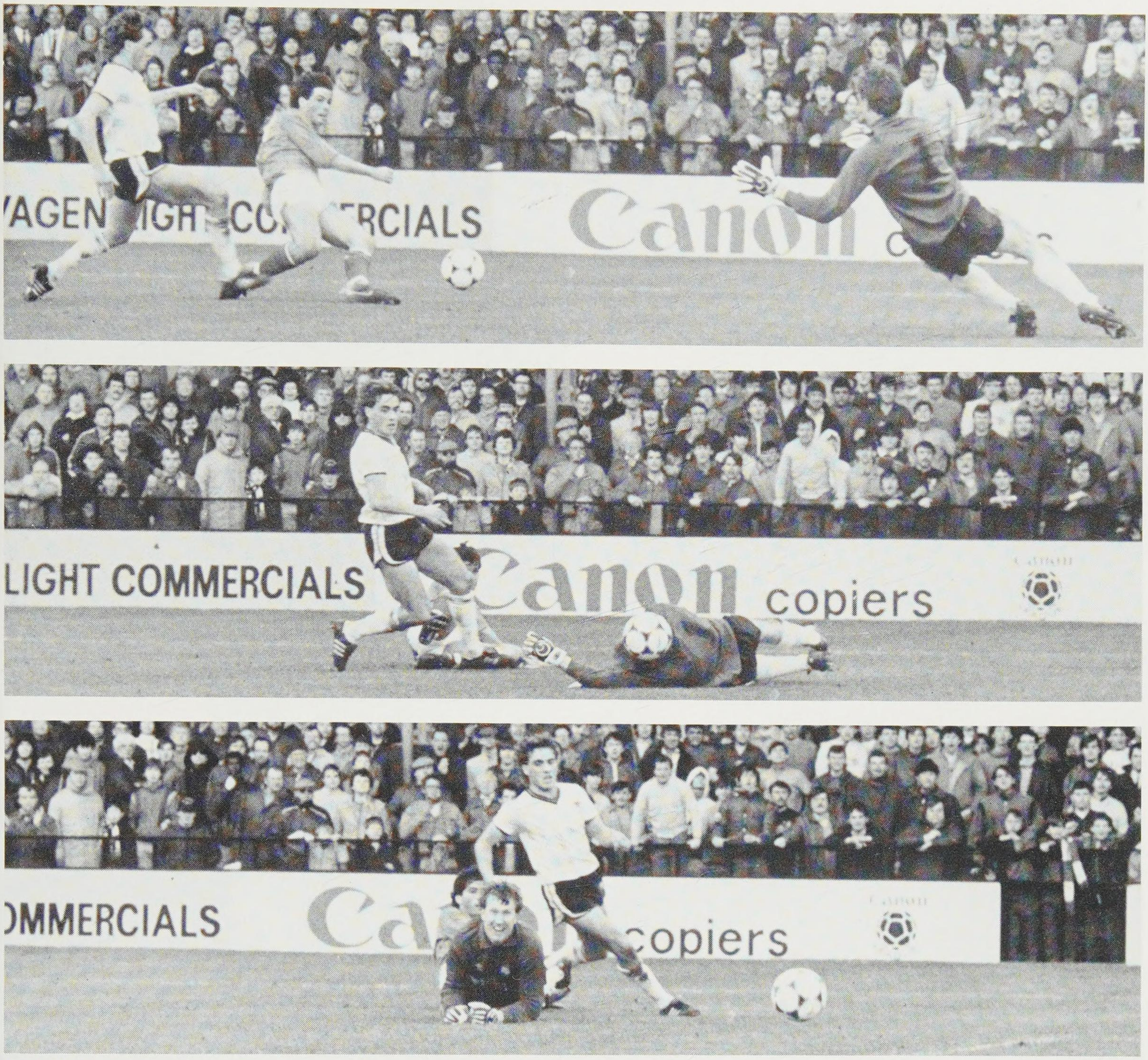
But it was two points lost and the promotion equation of win at home and draw away, demanded that Pompey should compensate at Craven Cottage on Easter Monday. They did!

April 8
FULHAM 1, POMPEY 3

Fulham had induced the season's most dramatic collapse at Fratton on New Year's Day – in the Easter sunshine they paid for it. Pompey did more than beat the Londoners – to the delight of an enormous army of supporters, they outclassed them. Revelling on a level, well-grassed surface, Fulham's dividend for investing in a revolutionary cell-system pitch and for evicting their Rugby League counterparts who had earlier caused considerable damage, Pompey produced a devastating display of imaginative football.



Climbing high, high, high . . . . Noel Blake scales the heights above Mick Ferguson and Terry Connor. (Picture by Ian Gledhill)



Neil Webb shoots, Gerry Peyton is too late and can only watch.

Pompey had the match in their grip from the ninth minute when Kevin Dillon struck a goal of stunning quality. Running on to Vince Hilaire's low cross, the midfield man who was the afternoon's outstanding personality, lashed a fierce shot past an astonished Gerry Peyton which hit the inside of one post and hurtled into the net off the other. Peyton was later to produce a fine save to deny Neil Webb but in the last seconds of the half Pompey conjured another classic goal to underline their total superiority. Again Dillon played a decisive part, this time as instigator with a run and perfectly weighted pass which unleashed Webb to slide home his 16th goal of the season.

Fulham had by then not threatened and their first serious hint of a chance ended in them going three down. Noel Blake, yet again beat Leroy Rosenior for possession, and his clearance launched a counter-attack which ended with goal number 17 for Webb.

Fulham finally broke Pompey's defensive stranglehold with six minutes remaining when Rosenior at last managed to beat Blake to nod home a high cross from Ray Houghton – a strike Pompey's goal-difference could have done without.

The one debit to the week-end was disciplinary. Mick Kennedy, now such a crucial figure, was already booked to miss the key matches against Birmingham and Crystal Palace, Mick Tait and Kevin O'Callaghan were also out of the Palace match, while Dillon was on the brink – and was to go over it later on. Otherwise it was highly satisfactory – and official and public delight grew with

the news that Manchester City had been surprisingly beaten at home by Leeds to allow Pompey back into second place.

Fulham: Peyton, Cottington, Carr, Elkins, Marshall, Locke, Scott, Wilson, Rosenior, Houghton, Lewington. Sub, Reeves.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Waldron, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan, Kennedy, Morgan, Webb, Hilaire. Sub, Doyle.
Referee: J. Ashworth (Luffenham).
Attendance: 12,542.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

	Home Goals						Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Oxford	34	14	1	1	48	12	6	6	6	17	16	67
POMPEY	36	10	6	2	34	19	7	8	3	26	23	65
Man City	36	12	3	3	35	15	6	7	5	19	16	64
Birmingham	35	8	6	3	22	14	11	0	7	25	17	63
Blackburn	35	12	3	2	32	13	5	7	6	23	23	61
Brighton	36	11	5	2	24	9	5	6	7	16	18	59
Leeds	36	9	7	2	31	10	7	3	8	26	28	58
Fulham	35	11	2	5	31	24	5	4	8	27	33	54
Shrewsbury	34	10	5	2	39	19	4	5	8	19	29	52
Barnsley	34	10	5	2	25	10	3	8	6	14	20	52

April now held three more matches – two at home and one away; the two at home six pointers against Birmingham and Manchester City, that away – a top v. bottom affair with Palace in need of every point to stave off relegation. All three were to hold bitter disappointment for Ball – not a point from nine.

Not much joy for Peyton again; Webb beats him for his second goal.

Excuse me, Mr. Lock. Neil Webb eases himself in front of Fulham's Kevin Lock.

Gerry Peyton may not have enjoyed Neil Webb's second goal - Webb and Kevin O'Callaghan did.

April 13
POMPEY 1, BIRMINGHAM 3

Another big occasion – another let down. The recent history of Fratton Park holds many examples of this curious 'Achilles heel'.

The collision between the sides second and third in the table drew the season's largest gate but with Pompey failing to harness the stiff following win in the first half or master a difficult pitch of erratic bounce, things looked ominous when they could do no more than reach the interval all square at 1-1.

And to do even that Pompey had to come from behind. They might have snatched the lead after only two minutes but when Kevin Dillon's curling free kick came back off the post, Birmingham reacted quicker than Pompey and scrambled the ball away.

The Midlanders, seeking to end a run of three successive away defeats which threatened their promotion ambitions, quickly saw Wayne Clarke fire just too high and then took the lead in the sixth minute with a goal which asked questions of Pompey's marking. Gerry Daly's neat little pass in from the right found David Geddis with room to flick the ball between Alan Knight and the near post. The lead lasted two minutes and then Dillon conjured a magical equalizer as he controlled Billy Gilbert's free kick and, though losing his balance, whipped it past David Seaman.

Late on Neil Webb might have put Pompey ahead but his vulnerability in one-and-one situations with goalkeepers saw Seaman manage to block his shot. Pompey spent the entire second half under pressure and cracked in the 63rd minute with Knight beaten by Daly's corner for Geddis to force the ball into the net between Paul Hardyman's legs. Eleven minutes later Knight's indecision over ownership of a Daly free kick confused Blake and the ball bounced off his shins for Geddis to gleefully accept a gift-wrapped hat trick.

Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Hardyman, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan, Doyle, Morgan, Webb, Hilaire. Sub, Waldron.
Birmingham: Seaman, Ranson, Roberts, Wright, Armstrong, Kuhl, Daly, Clarke, Bremner, Geddis, Hopkins. Sub, Kennedy.
Referee: Noel Butler (East Molesey).
Attendance: 23,983.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

	Home Goals						Away Goals						
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Oxford	35	14	1	1	48	12	7	6	6	19	17	70
Birmingham	36	8	6	3	22	14	12	0	7	28	18	66
POMPEY	37	10	6	3	35	22	7	8	3	26	23	65
Blackburn	36	12	3	2	32	13	6	7	6	25	24	64
Man City	37	12	3	3	35	15	6	7	6	20	20	64
Brighton	37	11	5	2	24	9	6	6	7	18	19	62
Leeds	37	10	7	2	35	11	7	3	8	26	28	61
Shrewsbury	36	10	6	2	39	19	5	5	8	20	29	56
Grimsby	36	12	1	6	43	27	4	6	7	21	26	55
Barnsley	35	11	5	2	27	11	3	8	6	14	20	55

Pompey's cause had not been helped by the bare bumpy surface which Fratton's once immaculate pitch now offered, something which contrasted starkly with that on which they had flowed so luxuriously at Fulham. And so, to avert further damage before the remaining home fixtures, Mr. Deacon banned all other use. But before the promotion-chasing men were to use it again, their hopes – and those of the entire City had taken another cruel blow.

Ecstacy on the extremes - Wayne Clarke (left) and David Geddis - misery in the middle Noel Blake, flat-out Billy Gilbert and Alan Knight. Birmingham are 3-1 up.

Not a pretty sight. David Geddis is one against four - but wins out and Birmingham's second goal goes through Paul Hardyman's legs - the expressions say it all.

Flashpoint. Alan Knight tries to cool down big Noel Blake who is none too amused with Birmingham's David Geddis.

Nicky Morgan flicks the ball through; Neil Webb shoots, Dave Seaman blocks - and then stretches and stretches to deny Vince Hilaire and allow Billy Wright to sweep up the pieces.

continued on next page

copiers

Eyes up. The ball's up there somewhere men.

Les parapluies de Selhurst . . . .

April 22
CRYSTAL PALACE 2, POMPEY 1

The Birmingham defeat had been disappointing – this was utterly demoralizing. On a boggy, rain-lashed pitch Pompey failed to compete against a side who seemed to find greater incentive in the peril of their position on the fringe of relegation than Pompey in the proximity of promotion.

Pompey were without the inspirational Mick Kennedy, Mick Tait and Kevin O'Callaghan, and Ball surprised all by his decision to recall Dave Thomas from his youth team duties as O'Callaghan's deputy. Thomas tried hard to produce the width Ball was looking for, but was eventually replaced by Scott McGarvey, who found no greater joy.

But basically Pompey foundered on a single rock – the giant Micky Droy. The 6ft 5in veteran defender, who had almost moved to Fratton a year earlier, dominated Pompey's over-awed attack. Pompey made his job easier by continually trying to find Neil Webb and Nicky Morgan's head – and Droy was always a head above them. But it was his awesome presence in Pompey's penalty area which really undid them. He scored the first goal himself, snapping up a rebound after his first header had been blocked.

Pompey though were quickly level as Webb neatly controlled Vince Hilaire's cross, beat Jim Cannon and rifled home his 18th goal of the season. Immediately it took a brilliant save by Knight to prevent Andy Gray, a youngster fresh out of the Isthmian League, restoring Palace's lead. Pompey were never menacing and it was almost inevitable that the hungrier Palace side should go ahead again – and certainly inevitable that Droy should play his part. His presence distracted Pompey's defence as Murphy took another corner and Gray gleefully hooked home the decisive goal.

Crystal Palace: Wood, Locke, Sparrow, Taylor, Droy, Cannon, Irvine, Murphy, Aylott, Gray, Stebbing. Sub, Finnigan.
Pompey: Knight, Waldron, Hardyman, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, Thomas (McGarvey), Doyle, Morgan, Webb, Hilaire.
Referee: R.G. Smith (Banbury).
Attendance: 10,215.

After that performance, the London Marathon must have seemed an awfully long, hard road to Ball the next morning as he joined the thousands and covered the course in 3 hours 30 minutes to raise funds for a Southampton school for the handicapped.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

	Home Goals						Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Oxford	37	16	1	1	56	14	7	6	6	19	17	76
Birmingham	38	10	6	3	27	15	12	0	7	28	18	72
Blackburn	37	13	3	2	35	13	6	7	6	25	24	67
Man City	38	13	3	3	37	15	6	7	6	20	20	67
POMPEY	38	10	6	3	35	22	7	8	4	27	25	65
Brighton	38	11	6	2	25	10	6	6	7	18	19	63
Leeds	38	10	7	2	35	11	7	4	8	27	29	62
Shrewsbury	37	11	6	2	41	19	5	5	8	20	29	59
Fulham	38	12	2	5	33	25	5	5	9	28	36	58
Grimsby	37	12	1	6	43	27	4	6	8	22	28	55

Pompey's post-Palace week was not improved when England announced their under 21 squad for the European championship in Rumania - neither Neil Webb nor Paul Hardyman were included - and that prompted Ball into an angry attack on the national set up. He accused them of exploiting youngsters to generate a gate by creating local interest. His understandable reaction was not appreciated by Bobby Robson - but Ball remained unrepentant.

And once again Webb was the centre of transfer speculation with Aston Villa reportedly keen - but Pompey refuted suggestions they were keen to do a deal involving veteran England striker Peter Withe... six weeks later that was very much on the cards but did not materialize.

But suddenly, the gloom of the Palace defeat was lifted - by Palace. They followed up that performance by beating Blackburn and so the Lancashire club's game in hand had gone and they were only two points ahead... victory in the remaining four matches would see Pompey up. Certainly the bookies thought they could do it; Pompey were 11-8 with Blackburn and Manchester City 2-1. First though Pompey had to beat both City and Blackburn to keep their hopes alive...

Two immovable objects . . . . Noel Blake and Old Man Mountain Droy.

April 27
POMPEY 1, MANCHESTER CITY 2

Another big occasion – another disappointment. This was the match which ultimately would have opened the door for Pompey, coming as it did on the day Blackburn were surprisingly beaten by Charlton. But again Pompey found it all too much for them.

They could point to three athletic saves by Alex Williams, from Neil Webb, Nicky Morgan and Kevin Dillon, as the reason for their downfall. But despite Williams' agility, Pompey should have imposed their authority on a side who for a long time looked even more jittery than they were.

The first half, apart from those Williams saves and one by Alan Knight from Steve Kinsey, was an anti-climax. But when City poached a sloppy goal early in the second half, with Pompey's defence drawn fatally out of position leaving Kevin O'Callaghan as the man to challenge and be beaten by David Phillips at the far post, it sparked an absorbing contest.

Pompey at last began to show their teeth and when Morgan forced home the equalizer from Mick Tait's flick on, the crowd licked their lips. City were under seige and at times in panic, but Pompey could not crack them and then with just eight minutes left, they were caught by another poor goal. A long bouncing pass from Andy May beat Billy Gilbert and, with Knight in no man's land, Paul Simpson, a teenage novice playing only because of a massive Maine Road injury list, clipped the decisive goal over him. All that remained was for referee Bodenham to ignore Pompey's second valid looking penalty appeal of the afternoon, and for Webb to be half carried, half dragged off semi conscious after a collision with Mick McCarthy, and Pompey's misery was complete. The defeat left Pompey five points behind City on 39 matches – City with two at home and one away, Pompey two away and one at home.

Pompey: Knight, Tait, Hardyman, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan, Kennedy, Morgan, Webb, Hilaire, Sub, Doyle.
Manchester City: Williams, Clements, Power, Reid, McCarthy, Phillips, Simpson, May, Tolmie, Smith, Kinsey. Sub, Lomax.
Referee: Martin Bodenham (Brighton).
Attendance: 22,459.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

	Home Goals						Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Oxford	39	17	1	1	57	14	7	6	7	19	18	79
Birmingham	39	10	6	3	27	15	13	0	7	29	18	75
Man City	39	13	3	3	37	15	7	7	6	22	21	70
Blackburn	39	13	3	3	35	14	6	7	7	25	25	67
Leeds	39	11	7	2	36	11	7	4	8	27	29	65
POMPEY	39	10	6	4	36	24	7	8	4	27	25	65
Brighton	39	11	6	2	25	10	6	6	8	19	21	63
Shrewsbury	39	11	6	2	41	19	6	5	9	21	30	62
Fulham	39	12	2	5	33	25	6	5	9	32	36	61
Grimsby	38	13	1	6	45	28	4	6	8	22	28	58

Webb spent the rest of the week-end clearing fuddled senses to find himself the centre of more speculation. This time champions-elect Everton were said to be ready to pay £500,000 for him. Again Mr. Deacon was quickly denying the stories – but stressing that if Webb turned down another a-soon-to-be-offered new contract, it would cost half a million to prise him away from Fratton rather than the £250,000 which had twice been agreed with Q.P.R.

So Pompey needed something approaching a miracle; they had to win their three remaining matches and Manchester had to oblige by getting only three points from their's. And it almost happened.

Come on, ball. You're mine. Alex Williams claims possession emphatically.

Alan Ball gives vocal support in this vital game.

City defender Mick McCarthy walks past his flattened victim, Neil Webb, leaving John Dicken and Gordon Neave to pick up the pieces.

Two heads are better than one; Neil Webb loses out to Mick McCarthy and Nicky Reid (4).

Out numbered. Mick Tait and Billy Gilbert sort out a spot of bother.

A hair-raising moment for Nicky Morgan - Mick McCarthy and Alex Williams can't see the joke.

Nicky Morgan strikes, turns away and the celebrations begin - on pitch and in the stand; Alex Williams face says it all for City.

continued on next page

The long arm of goalkeeping . . . Alex Williams reaches and conquers.

Over the top. Neil Webb is airborne and Andy May gets that Sinbad feeling.

POMPEY

11. May 1985

May 4
BLACKBURN ROVERS 0, POMPEY 1

The first phase in the miracle was achieved in Lancashire – Pompey got their win and City a few short miles away, played their part by being held to a goal-less draw at home to Oldham.

Pompey's joy was blighted by the sending off of young Paul Wood. Wood had been drafted in to share the central striking duties with Neil Webb through Nicky Morgan's injury and had looked sharp and effective. But in a match where tempers and tackles frequently ran high, he became involved in an ugly incident with Blackburn centre-half Glenn Keeley for which both were booked. A few minutes later Keeley got 'the first one in' as they tangled again and this time both were sent off, although television later exonerated Pompey's young striker.

Pompey though had the last laugh; their promotion dream was still just alive thanks to a soaring header by Mick Tait which gave him his first goal of the season, and Blackburn's was all but dead.

Blackburn: Gennoe, Branagan, Rathbone, Barker, Keeley, Fazackerly, Miller, Randell, Quinn, Garner, Brotherston. Sub, Lowey.
Pompey: Knight, Tait, Hardyman, Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan, Kennedy, Wood, Webb, Hilaire. Sub, Doyle.
Referee: John Lovatt (Crewe).
Attendance: 7,747.

So the dream moved on to Bank Holiday Monday – Pompey at home to Carlisle; City away to relegation headed Notts County.

Some partings come wider than others . . . . Noel Brotherston and Neil Webb display disparate hair-dos.

Mick Kennedy's flat out and being patched; Colin Randell's being booked for putting him there.

There was this 'eadless man you see.

Flashpoint; Glen Keeley homes in from behind on Paul Wood. Keeley's gone, Wood is down, and tempers flare; and then Wood finds he's off as well.

continued on next page

I'll hold your arm and you hold my shirt . . . . Vince Hilaire and Blackburn's Mick Rathbone.

May 6
POMPEY 3, CARLISLE 1

Pompey made their fans sweat it out in the sun before clinching victory in the final home match of the season with two late goals. And then they had to wait 25 agonizing minutes for the confirmation that the door to the First Division was still open. For that was how long City's match at Meadow Lane had been delayed by a pitch invasion; the wait was worthwhile. City had lost and so both would go in to their last match on 71 points but with City five goals better off.

Pompey, shoving thoughts of recent Fratton tremors into the back of their thoughts, struck early against Carlisle with Neil Webb's cross being controlled and neatly tucked away by Vince Hilaire. The roar of approval had scarcely died when it was followed by another, and then another – the news of County's first two strikes against Manchester had come through on myriad transistors. But Pompey, for all their lead, found control difficult against a battling side and shortly before the interval one-time Brighton striker Malcolm Poskett set up the equalizer for Mick Halsall. Ball's half time talk had an air of Agincourt about it – and his players responded.

Pompey set up camp around Carlisle's penalty area – but the lead would not return. Paul Wood suffered from one brilliant save by Dave McKellar, Noel Blake powered a header down into the goalmouth and saw it rear up and over the bar – and then painful memories flooded back for the crowd as Carlisle suddenly countered and John Halpin glanced an unchallenged header narrowly wide.

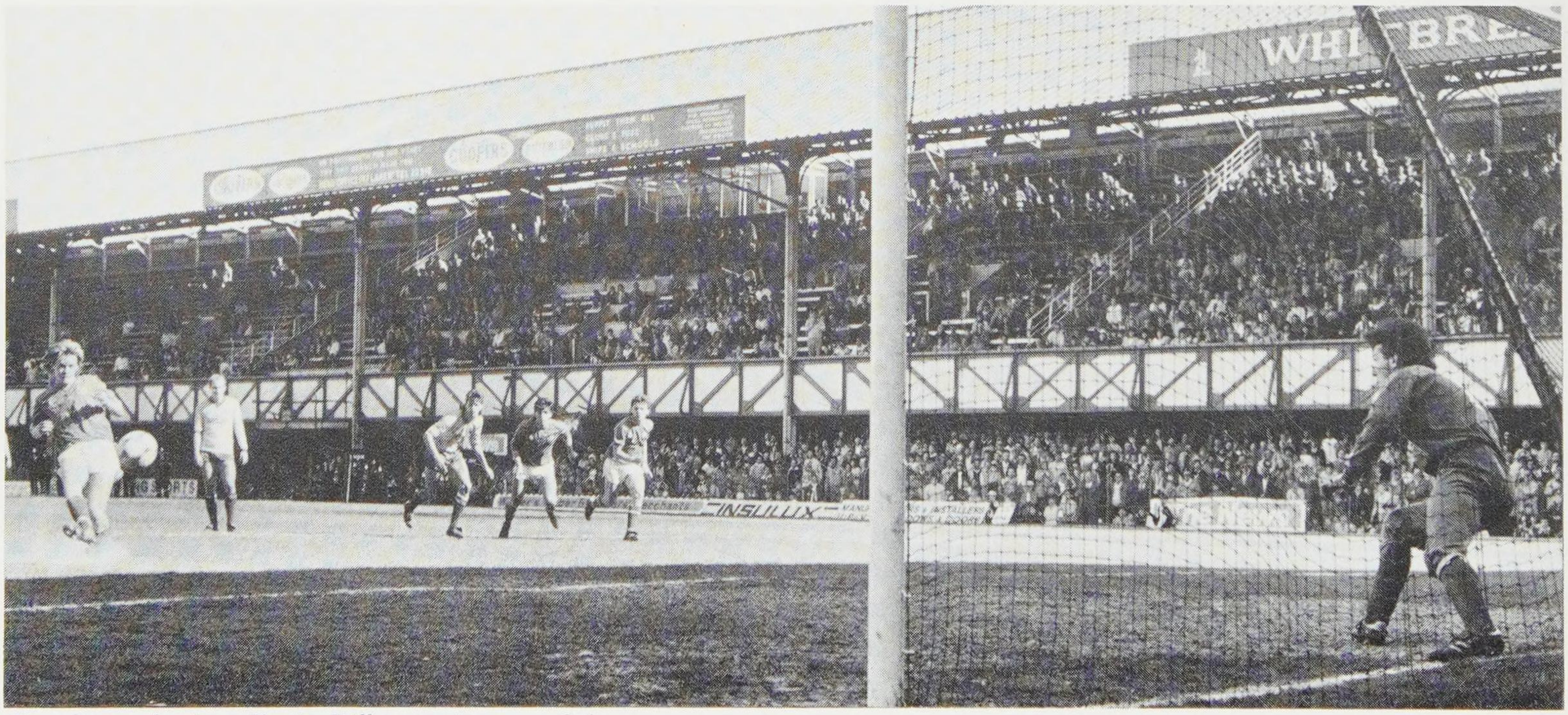
But with 12 minutes left Webb for the second time in the match set up Hilaire, and for the second time the little winger finished the job. But with every goal crucial, they needed more and on the stroke of full time Kevin Dillon buried yet another immaculate penalty after he had been brought down. Twenty five minutes later Manchester City's surprise setback was confirmed and the crowd began planning their routes to Huddersfield for the last match.

Pompey: Knight, Tait, Hardyman (Doyle), Dillon, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan, Kennedy, Wood, Webb, Hilaire.
Carlisle: McKellar, Haigh, McCartney, Ashurst, O'Riordan, McAughtrie, Gorman, Halsall, Poskett (Hill), Bishop, Halpin.
Referee: Tony Ward (London).
Attendance: 12,404.

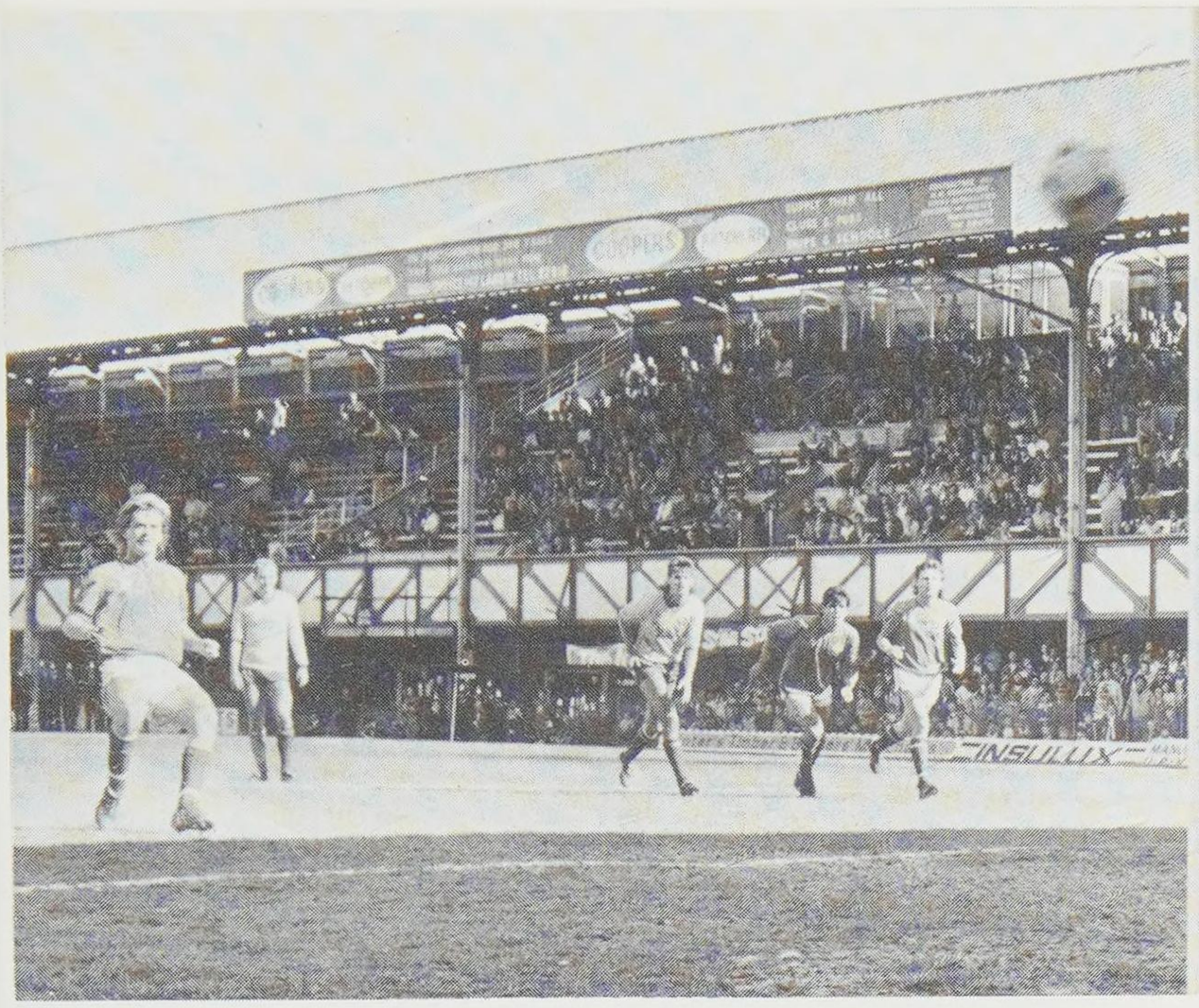
Top of the Table
DIVISION II

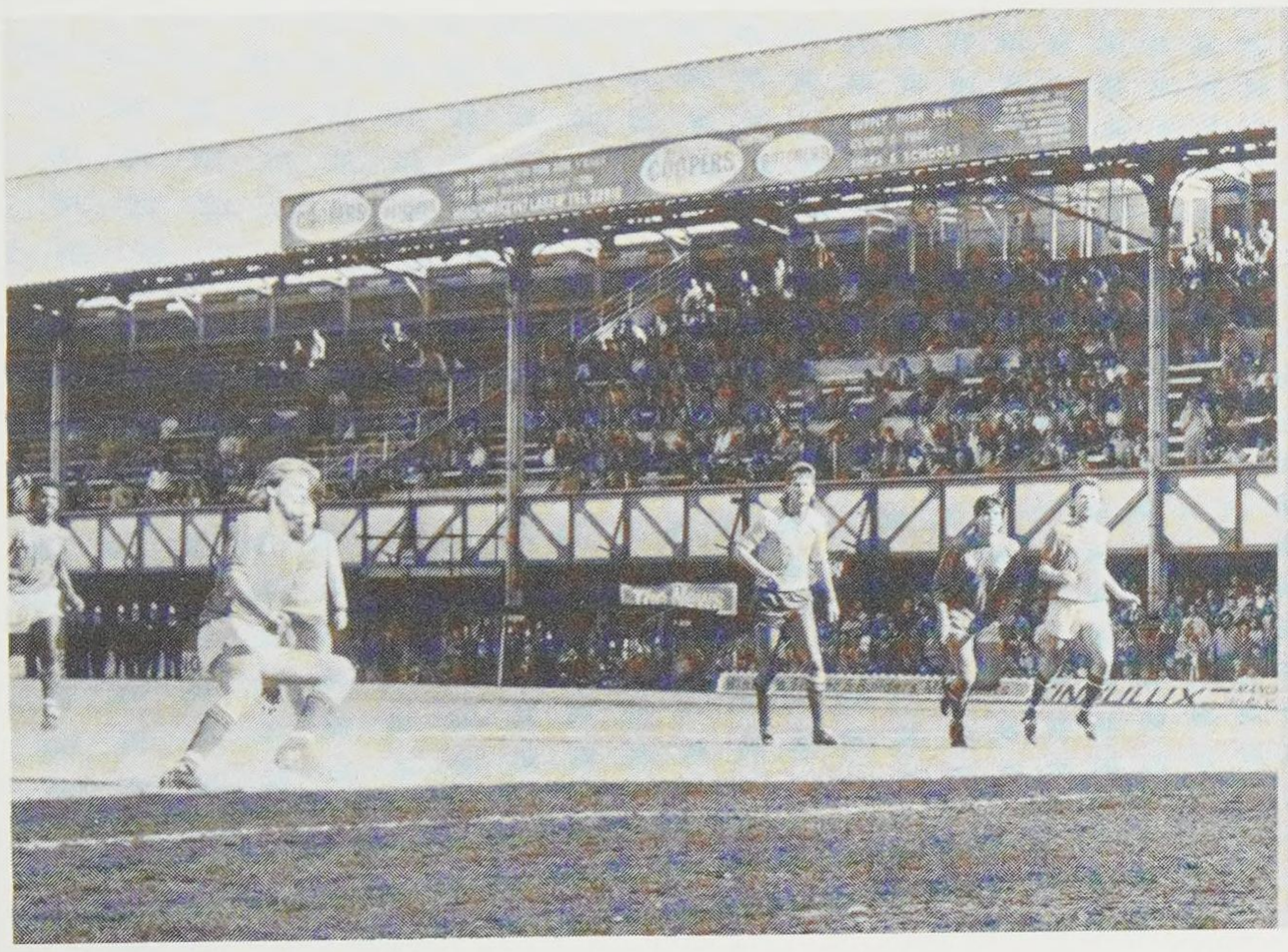
	Home Goals						Away Goals						
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Oxford	40	17	2	1	58	15	7	6	7	19	18	80
Birmingham	41	11	6	3	29	15	13	1	7	29	18	79
Man City	41	13	4	3	37	15	7	7	7	24	24	71
POMPEY	41	11	6	4	39	25	8	8	4	28	25	71
Blackburn	41	13	3	4	35	15	7	7	7	28	26	70
Leeds	41	12	7	2	37	11	7	5	8	29	31	69
Brighton	40	12	6	2	30	11	6	6	8	19	21	66

So the marathon reached its last lap – the first two 'runners' – Oxford and Birmingham – already over the line; three shoulder to shoulder for third place. A victory by Manchester at home to Charlton, the side who had embarrased both Pompey and Blackburn, would see them up what-ever Pompey or Blackburn did; but any further demonstration of the jangling nerves they had shown against Oldham and Notts County, and they could be overhauled. Pompey at least did their bit to make the dream come true...



Penalty perfection; Kevin Dillon again . . . . 3-1.





May 11
HUDDERSFIELD 0, POMPEY 2

Victory - yet defeat. Pompey won their ninth away match of the season - and it was not enough. By the time Kevin O'Callaghan, who had looked so much more effective in away matches, broke the deadlock with possibly the best goal scored by a Pompey player for years, most people already knew the dream had been impossible after all. For that goal came in the 19th minute - and ten minutes earlier those inevitable 'trannies' on the terraces had delivered the news of the first nail in their coffin - City's first goal against an outclassed Charlton.

When O'Callaghan set off on his run from the half way line past a string of defenders to put Pompey ahead, the Huddersfield fans were already taunting those from the South Coast with the news of City's second goal.

Pompey's players sensed it too - but they were determined to go out in style, and did so; and their massive army of support were equally determined to live up to their recently acquired tag as the Second Division's best supporters. So what might have been a wake, turned into a carnival. On the pitch Pompey were different class to opposition who over the years have run them close in a series of fine contests, and on the terraces and in the stands, the Fratton fans gave a magnificent demonstration of the art of old-time support. Few sensed that just a few miles away, the ultimate footballing tragedy was being played out at Bradford's Valley Parade.

When the news of the tragic fire eventually filtered in and its magnitude was known, somehow all else was put into perspective. Pompey though went on to win with a comfort not reflected in the score-line, Vince Hilaire grabbing their second goal in the 70th minute. But by then City were on their way up with a 5-1 annihilation of Charlton which ultimately stretched the crucial goal difference to seven.

Huddersfield: Cox, Measham, Carmody, Robinson, Webster, Allardyce, Lillis, Pugh, Tempest (Butler), Wilson, Copper.
Pompey: Knight, Stanley, Tait, Francis, Blake, Gilbert, O'Callaghan (Doyle), Kennedy, Wood, Webb, Hilaire.
Referee: George Tyson (Sunderland).
Attendance: 13,290.

Top of the Table
DIVISION II

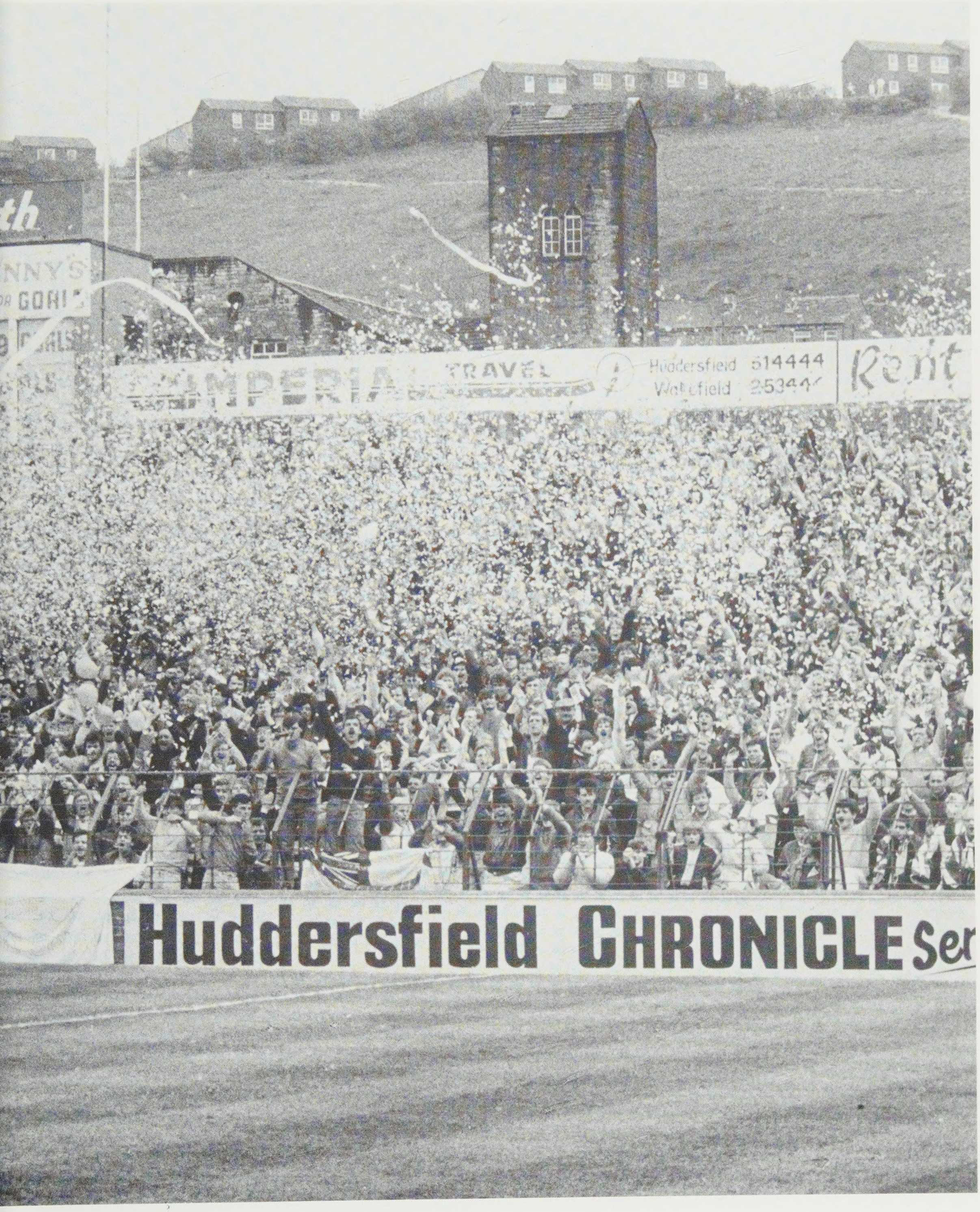
	Home Goals						Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Oxford	42	18	2	1	62	15	7	7	7	22	21	84
Birmingham	42	12	6	3	30	15	13	1	7	29	18	82
Man City	42	14	4	3	42	16	7	7	7	24	24	74
POMPEY	42	11	6	4	39	25	9	8	4	30	25	74
Blackburn	42	14	3	4	38	15	7	7	7	28	26	73
Brighton	42	13	6	2	31	11	7	6	8	23	23	72
Leeds	42	12	7	2	37	11	7	5	9	29	32	69
Shrewsbury	42	12	6	3	45	22	6	5	10	21	31	65
Fulham	42	13	3	5	35	26	6	5	10	33	38	65
Grimsby	42	13	1	7	47	32	5	7	9	25	32	62

In the post match despondency two things were clarified -that Neil Webb had played his last match for Pompey - and that Noel Blake had not. Webb decided to exercise his freedom of contract and within ten days had signed for Nottingham Forest while Blake, after all his problems, had decided to soldier on at Fratton.

I'm the boss. Noel Blake dominates again.

Big Sam and young Neil.

More work for the sweepers. Pompey's ticker-tape welcome at Huddersfield.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Huddersfield CHRONICLE Ser

Kevin O'Callaghan slots home the goal of Pompey's season; he enjoys it and does a lap of honour to prove it.

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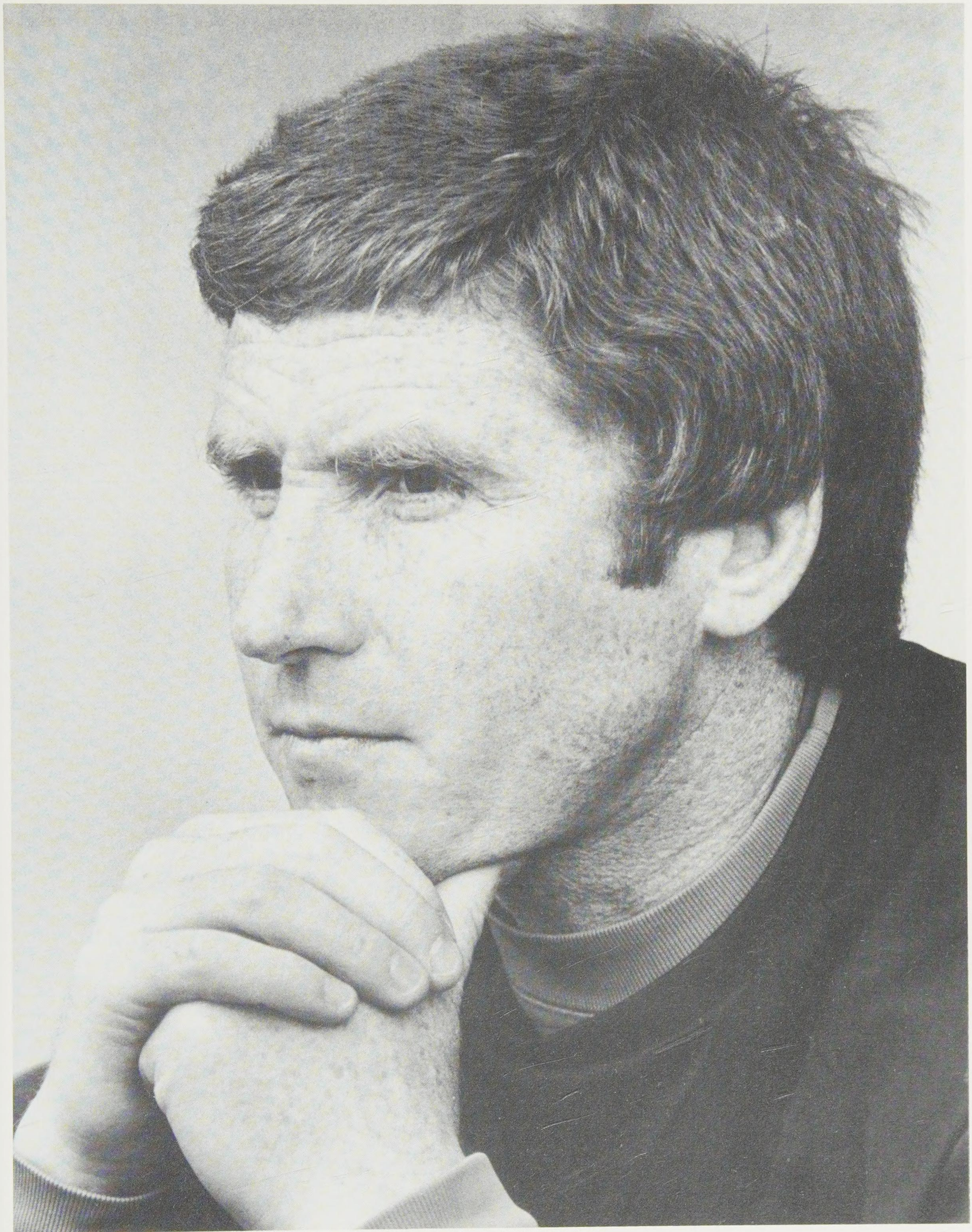
SPEC
VI

Final Table
1984-85
DIVISION II

	Home Goals						Away Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Oxford	42	18	2	1	62	15	7	7	7	22	21	84
Birmingham	42	12	6	3	30	15	13	1	7	29	18	82
Man City	42	14	4	3	42	16	7	7	7	24	24	74
POMPEY	42	11	6	4	39	25	9	8	4	30	25	74
Blackburn	42	14	3	4	38	15	7	7	7	28	26	73
Brighton	42	13	6	2	31	11	7	6	8	23	23	72
Leeds	42	12	7	2	37	11	7	5	9	29	32	69
Shrewsbury	42	12	6	3	45	22	6	5	10	21	31	65
Fulham	42	13	3	5	35	26	6	5	10	33	38	65
Grimsby	42	13	1	7	47	32	5	7	9	25	32	62
Barnsley	42	11	7	3	27	12	3	9	9	15	30	58
Wimbledon	42	9	8	4	40	29	7	2	12	31	46	58
Huddersfield	42	9	5	7	28	29	6	5	10	24	35	55
Oldham	42	10	4	7	27	23	5	4	12	22	44	53
Crystal Pal	42	8	7	6	25	27	4	5	12	21	38	48
Carlisle	42	8	5	8	27	23	5	3	13	23	44	47
Charlton	42	8	7	6	34	30	3	5	13	17	33	45
Sheffield U	42	7	6	8	31	28	3	8	10	23	38	44
Middlesbro	42	6	8	7	22	26	4	2	15	19	31	40
Notts Cnty	42	6	5	10	25	32	4	2	15	20	41	37
Cardiff	42	5	3	13	24	42	4	5	12	23	37	35
Wolves	42	5	4	12	18	32	3	5	13	19	47	33



Alan Ball glances across at the final table and reflects on what might have been.

1984-1985 Statistics

Date	Venue	Opponents	Attendance	F-A HT	F-A FT	Knight	Stanley	Hardyman	Doyle	Blake	Waldron	Gilbert	Webb	Tait	McGarvey	Biley	Dillon	Morgan	Wood	Kennedy	Hilaire	O'Callaghan	Golac	Bamber	Sugrue	Ball K.	Thomas	Francis
Aug 25	H	Middlesbrough	13070	0-0	1-0	1	2	3*	4	5	6		7	8	9	10[1]	11	12										
Aug 28	H	Wimbledon (MC1)	8999	0-0	3-0	1	2		4	5	3*	6	7[2]	8	9	10	11[1]p		12									
Sept 1	A	Oxford Utd	11086	0-0	1-1	1	2		4	5		6	7	3	9*	10	11		12[1]	8								
Sept 4	A	Wimbledon (MC1)	4670	0-1	0-1	1	2		4	5		6	7	3	9	10	11		12	8								
Sept 8	H	Barnsley	11509	0-0	0-0	1	2		4	5		6	7	3	9	10	11*		12	8								
Sept 15	A	Leeds Utd	19438	0-0	1-0	1	2		4	5		6	7	3	9*	10[1]	11	12		8								
Sept 18	A	Birmingham City	18012	0-0	1-0	1	2		4	5		6	7[1]	3	12	10	11	9		8								
Sept 22	H	Shrewsbury Town	12703	0-0	3-0	1	2		4	5		6	7[2]	3	12	10	11	9[1]		8								
Sept 25	H	Nott Forest (MC2)	20409	0-0	1-0	1	2		4	5		6	7	3	12	10[1]	11*	9		8								
Sept 29	A	Charlton Athletic	9251	2-1	2-2	1	2		4	5		6	7	3	12	10[1]	11	9[1]		8								
Oct 2	H	Sheffield Utd	13439	0-1	2-1	1	2			5		6	7	3	12[1]	10	11	9[1]	4	8								
Oct 6	A	Cardiff City	6201	0-1	2-1	1	2			5	12	6	7[1]	3	4[1]	10	11	9		8								
Oct 10	A	Nott Forest (MC2)	18128	0-0	0-3†	1	2			5		6	7	3	10	12	11	9		8					4*			
Oct 13	H	Grimsby Town	13624	1-0	3-2	1	2		4	5		6	7[1]	3	10[1]	12[1]	11	9*		8								
Oct 20	A	Wimbledon	8212	0-2	2-3	1	2*		4[1]	5		6	7	3	10	12[1]	11	9		8								
Oct 27	H	Wolverhampton W	15291	0-1	0-1	1	2		4	5		6	7	3	12	10	11*	9		8								
Nov 3	A	Oldham Athletic	3946	0-0	2-0	1	2			5		6	7[1]	3	12	10	11	9[1]		8						4		
Nov 10	H	Notts County	12267	3-1	3-1	1	2		4[1]	5	12	6	7	3	10[2]		11	9		8								
Nov 17	H	Crystal Palace	12656	0-1	1-1	1	2		4	5		6	7	3	10	12		9[1]		8						11*		
Nov 24	A	Manchester City	23700	2-0	2-2	1	2		4	5	3	6	7[2]		10	12	11	9		8								
Dec 1	H	Blackburn Rovers	16284	0-2	2-2	1	2			5		6	7	3	10*	12	4[1]p	9		8	11[1]							
Dec 8	A	Carlisle Utd	4006	0-1	0-3	1	2		12	5	6		7	3	9	10	4*			8	11							
Dec 15	H	Huddersfield Town	11797	1-1	3-2	1	2[1]		12	5[1]	6		7	3		10[1]	4	9*		8	11							
Dec 22	H	Oxford Utd	22446	0-0	2-1	1	2		12	5	6		7	3		10[2]	4	9		8	11							
Dec 26	A	Brighton & H.A.	14854	1-1	1-1	1	2		12	5	6		7	3		10	4	9*		8	11[1]							
Dec 29	A	Sheffield Utd	14396	0-0	1-4	1	2		12	5	6		7	3	9		4[1]p			8	11		10					
Jan 1	H	Fulham	17636	4-0	4-4	1	2		7	5	6[1]		9[1]	3		10[2]	4			8	11						12	
Jan 5	H	B'burn R (FAC3)	14966	0-0	0-0	1		3	12	5	6		9	2		10	4			8	11						7	
Jan 19	A	Middlesbrough	4622	0-0	0-0	1		3		5		6	10	12			4	9		8	11			2			7	
Jan 26	A	B'burn R (FA3 rep)	12017	0-0	1-2	1		3		5		6	10	2	12		4	9		8[1]	11						7*	
Feb 2	H	Charlton Athletic	12319	0-0	0-1	1		3		5		6	4	12	11			9*		8	7	10	2					
Feb 9	A	Barnsley	7382	1-0	2-2	1		3		5[1]		6		12	11					8	7*	10	2	9			4	
Feb 23	H	Oldham Athletic	11108	3-0	5-1	1		3	4	5		6	7	12		10[2]	8[2]ps				11[1]		2	9				
Mar 2	A	Wolverhampton W	7985	0-0	0-0	1			4	5	3	6	7			10	8				11		2	9		12		
Mar 9	H	Wimbledon	11444	1-0	1-0	1		3		5		6	10[1]	12			4			8	11	7	2	9				
Mar 12	H	Leeds United	16208	2-1	3-1	1		3		5		6	10	12			4[1]	9[1]		8	11	7[1]	2*					
Mar 16	A	Grimsby Town	6197	1-1	3-2	1		3	12	5		6	10	2			4[1]p	9[1]		8	11[1]	7*						
Mar 23	H	Cardiff City	13620	0-0	0-0	1		3		5		6	10	12			4	9		8	11	7	2					
Mar 30	A	Shrewsbury Town	4140	0-0	0-0	1	12	3*	4	5		6	10	2				9		8	11	7						
Apr 2	A	Notts County	5631	3-1	3-1	1	2		12	5[1]		6	10[2]	3			4	9		8	11	7						
Apr 6	H	Brighton & H.A.	22867	1-1	1-1	1	2		12	5		6	10[1]	3			4	9		8	11	7						
Apr 8	A	Fulham	12542	2-0	3-1	1	2		12	5	3	6	10[2]				4[1]	9		8	11	7						
Apr 13	H	Birmingham City	23983	1-1	1-3	1	2	3	8	5	12	6	10				4[1]	9			11	7						
Apr 20	A	Crystal Palace	10215	1-1	1-2	1		3	8	5	2	6	10[1]		12		4	9			11					7*		
Apr 27	H	Manchester City	22459	0-0	1-2	1		3	12	5		6	10	2			4	9[1]		8	11	7						
May 4	A	Blackburn Rovers	7747	0-0	1-0	1		3	12	5		6	10	2[1]			4		9	8	11	7						
May 6	H	Carlisle Utd	12404	1-1	3-1	1		3*	12	5		6	10	2			4[1]p		9	8	11[2]	7						
May 11	A	Huddersfield Town	13290	1-0	2-0	1	2		12	5		6	10	3			4		9	8	11[1]	7*[1]					4	

League appearances	42	28	15	19	42	11	35	41	30	15	18	37	28	4	37	26	15	8	4	1	0	3	3
League goals	0	1	0	2	3	1	0	16	1	5	12	9	8	1	0	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
FA Cup appearances	2	0	2	0	2	1	1	2	2	0	1	2	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
FA Cup goals	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Milk Cup appearances	4	4	0	3	4	1	4	4	4	3	3	4	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Milk Cup goals	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Own goal: Laws (Barnsley) Feb 9

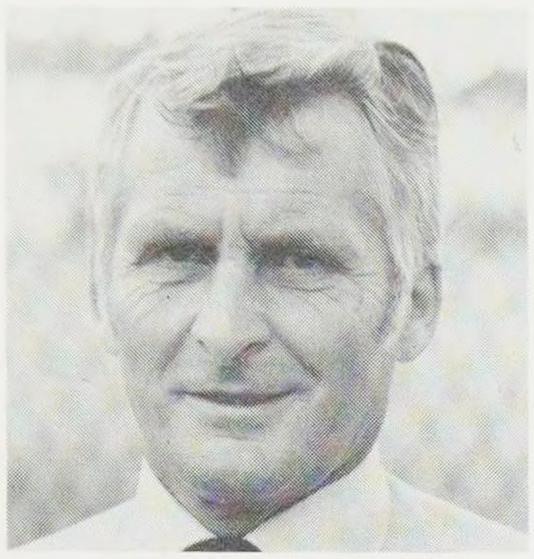
† after extra time

* substituted

GREENWICH

Excuse my hand, young sir.

The Authors



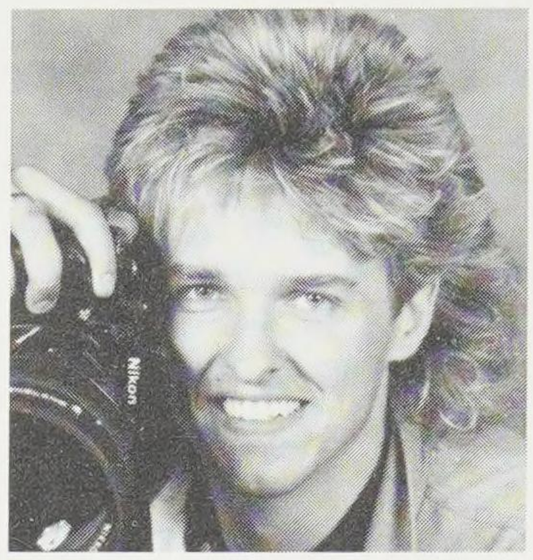
MIKE NEASOM has been interested in football for more seasons than he cares to remember.

He has covered Pompey for the past eleven years as chief sports writer for *The News* and *Sports Mail* and is a widely respected sports journalist.

Having watched his first match at Fratton Park in the late 1940's, he has been a staunch follower of the team's fortunes ever since.

He is a joint author of POMPEY. THE HISTORY OF PORTSMOUTH FOOTBALL CLUB which has received widespread acclaim.

A keen follower of all sports, especially cricket, Mike lives in Havant with his wife and two sons.



MURRAY SANDERS has always been interested in football and has played Sunday League in the Portsmouth area for the past ten years.

A lover of all sport, he keeps fit at squash and has a keen interest in modern sports cars.

He has been a photographer with *The News* for seven years and covered his first Pompey match in 1978. Since that time he has taken thousands of match shots and his photographs appear regularly in *The News* and *Sports Mail*.

His assignments in recent years include the Royal Wedding, Cowes Week, Wimbledon, International Football and Live Aid at Wembley.

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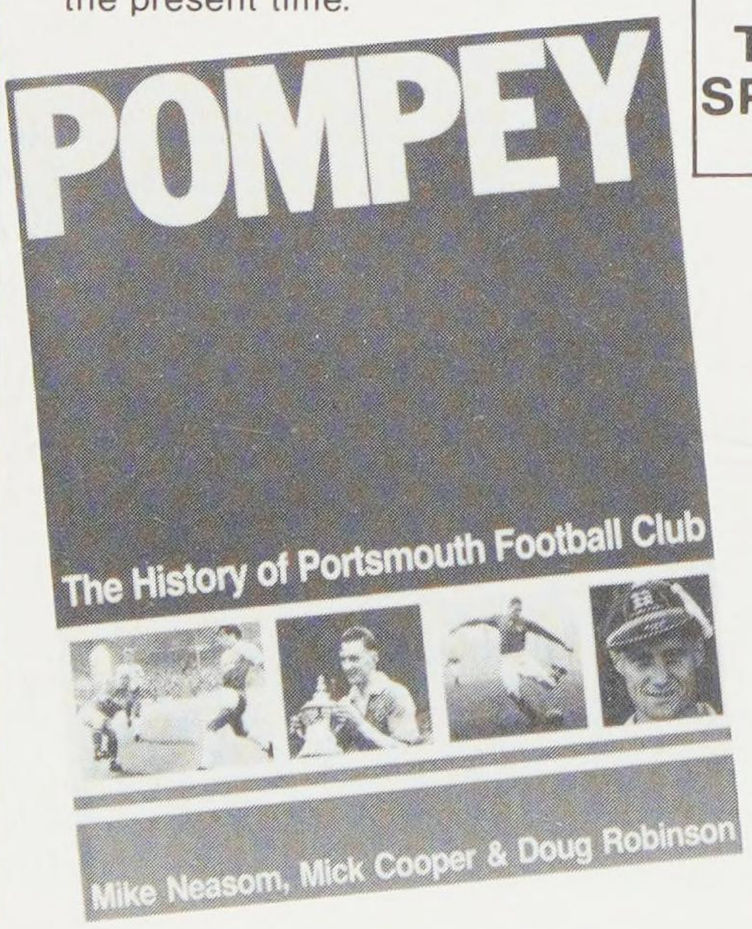

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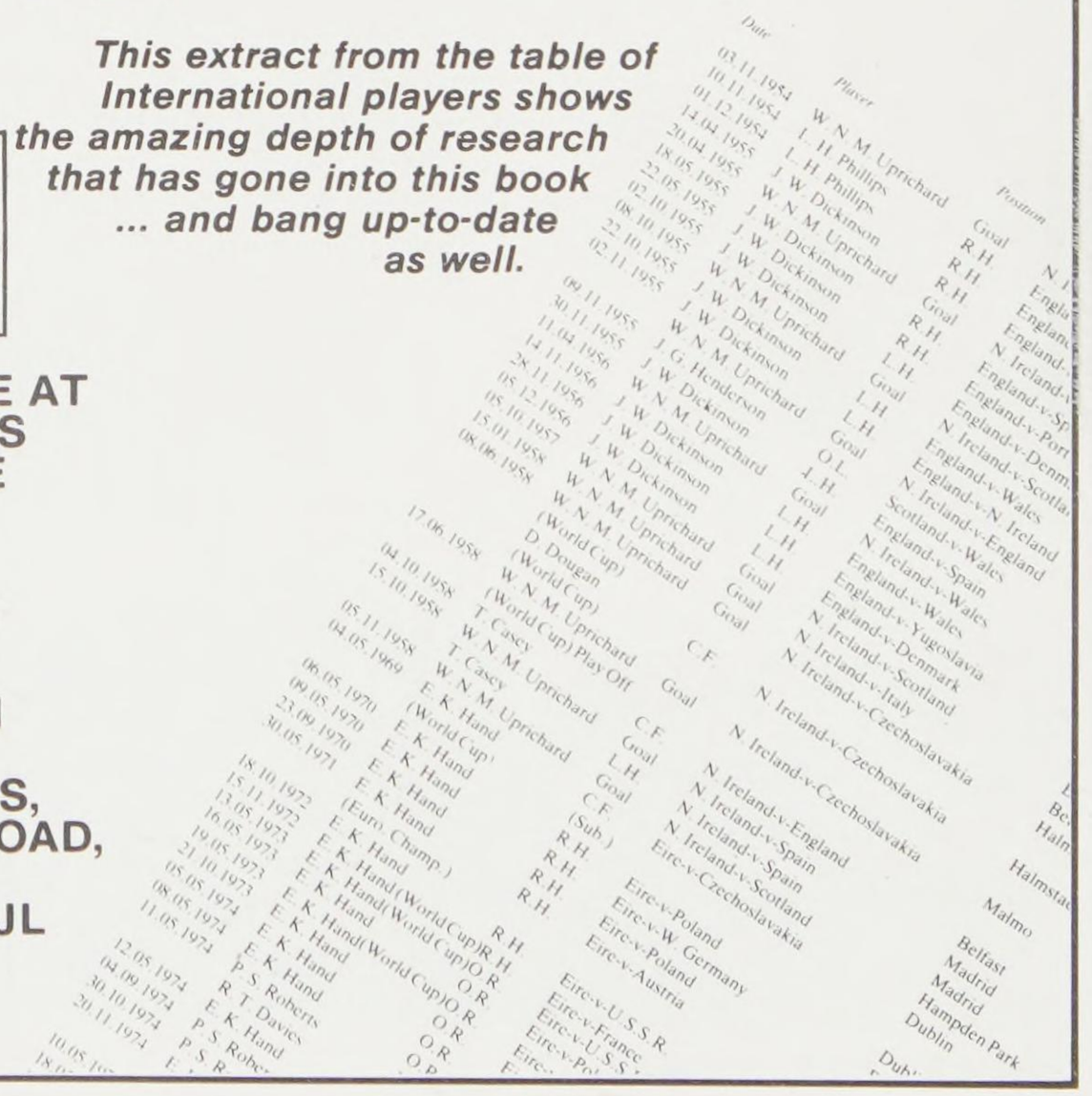
This extract from the table of International players shows the amazing depth of research that has gone into this book ... and bang up-to-date as well.



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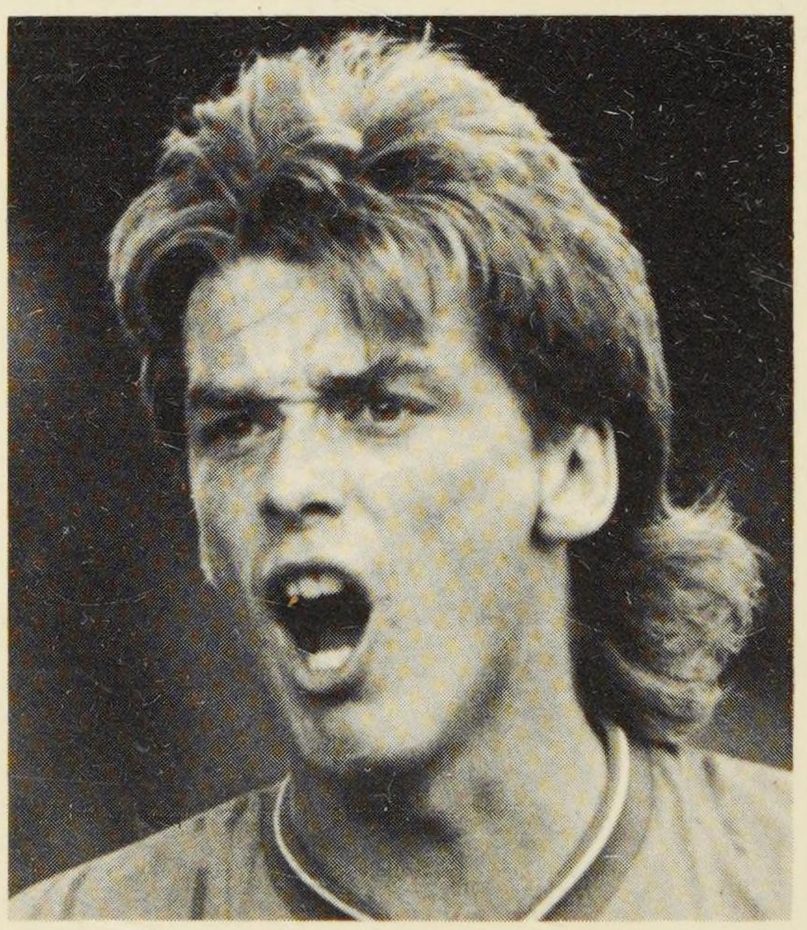

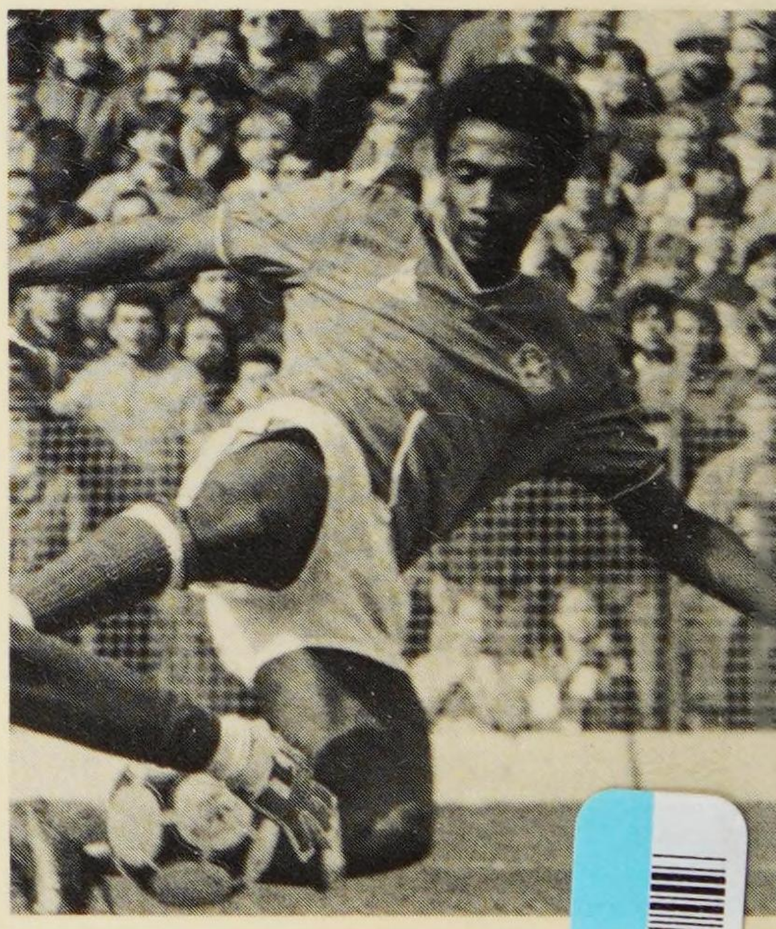

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